LAZY LAUGHTER

Woodward Boyd

Margery Gleason
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To dear ~~Joe~~

Just to while away
~~the~~ time

Mercedes '24

Bill Gleason
Bill Gleason

Henry Cuthbert Agne
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Billy Gleason

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LAZY LAUGHTER

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LAZY LAUGHTER

BY
WOODWARD BOYD
AUTHOR OF "THE LOVE LEGEND"

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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To
TOM

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BOOK ONE

THE TEA-TIME TOILERS

CHAPTER ONE

DUSTY GRANDEUR

The edifice which Charles Montgomery, with the whimsy considered in those days to be a social asset, had called his little crooked house, was a pile of ugly gray limestone built on the very edge of the sidewalk and in consequence leering over Summit Avenue like a majestic drunkard. Charles Montgomery had built it so close to the street because, he said, he wanted to be home when he got home. To get out of his carriage and climb five stone steps was quite enough exercise for him, and damn the artistic approach. Charles Montgomery had been the languid president of one of the more unimportant railroads; the house was always pointed out as the home of an empire builder. It had four towers and embodied four historical periods in architecture, a fact which Charles Montgomery himself was among the first to discover and satirize, for in his latter days Grandfather Montgomery acquired a humorous aloofness to his family and surroundings which displayed itself as naturally as if he had always had it.

When delicate health had brought him from the

east he had been young and imbued with the pioneer ideal; an ideal incongruous and even repugnant to his nature. In those days he had been worried about his lack of the thing called push and go. It was natural to him to deprecate pushing, and going seemed to him always to be scarcely worth while when he was so comfortable in the place in which he was. He did, however, have an asset which few of the hardier pioneers of that day possessed: a quantity of ready money. And in the hands of those men who were turning over fortunes in the northwest in the fifties, this money became a moderate fortune, enabling Charles Montgomery to retire and spend his years, discovering a philosophy which would enable him to enjoy his ease with a comfortable conscience. But since those days the house had fallen from its place of dominance. It was still one of the largest homes in the city, but a hundred smaller places were much smarter. Its grandeur was thought by every one, and most especially by the daughters of Charles Montgomery themselves, to have a touch of absurdity. And neither of them had the slightest talent for operating an establishment of any kind, much less one of its size. So even before the spectacular sweeping away of the Montgomery fortune by Paul Hallowell, the husband of Margaret Montgomery, the old house had never been the

austere dignitary among houses which it so patently aspired to be.

As Miriam Thorpe got out of her electric that afternoon and picked her way carefully over the icy pavement she was grateful to the dead Charles Montgomery for his notion of building the house so close to the walk. For she could not have gone in if there had been a long, uncared-for approach. Since the servants had gone, with the exception of one maid, it was almost impossible to get in as it was. Going up those steps where the snow, unshovelled and coated with ice, still lay, was as precarious as climbing a snowslide. She did achieve the top, and with a sigh of relief rang the bell, thinking, subconsciously, of tea, for she was rather fatigued and cold. Margaret Hallowell had telephoned that morning, asking her to stop for tea and to talk over the question about which the town was gossiping: Should she marry John Patlock before her husband had been dead six months?

The maid, Zedda, answered Miriam Thorpe's ring. A huge, ungainly girl, wearing a gray flannel dress, soiled and unkempt, as if to typify the family fortune, Zedda stood out as an individual to any caller at the house, partly because she didn't wear a uniform and partly because she was the only person there who faintly approached capability. Miriam thought of

Charles Montgomery's caprice of being unable to remember the names of the maids, and of addressing them as: "Hey, you, what the hell's your name?" Could he ever have forgotten the name of Zedda, who said her father named her for a letter in the Greek alphabet? She entered the living-room hallway with its spacious reaches to the balconies of the third floor. Here and there only was a pretense of order, and even here dust lay thickly on the lower edges of the door panels, and a heap of rubbish had accumulated in the unused fireplace.

"Mrs. Hallowell, she says you's to go on up to her room," said Zedda. "She's up there; I guess maybe she ain't feeling any too good."

Miriam mounted the wide, carpeted staircase. On the landing, the nook where Charles Montgomery had loved to sit and read, was piled a heap of what looked like soiled laundry mixed with old newspapers. Three chairs had been shoved there to be out of the way some place else, presumably. As she mounted, the dust all around grew thicker.

She found her way to Margaret Hallowell's room easily, for she had been familiar with the old house since her childhood, and entered to find Margaret struggling inexpertly with a black frock which she was endeavoring to make over into a costume suitable for the second-mourning period. Her daughter,

Dagmar Hallowell, a little girl of six, greeted Miriam Thorpe vociferously.

Margaret Hallowell sighed. "The children are perfectly unmanageable," she said. "Dagmar, do run and see what Herbie is doing."

Dagmar paid no attention to her mother's request. She did, however, tactically retire into the background and let the grown-up conversation go on without her assistance. She had little interest in it, though in spite of a certain attempt they made to be cryptic, she knew that they were talking of her mother's proposed marriage to John Patlock. She looked speculatively at the things on her mother's dressing-table and wondered if they would be of any assistance in making her beautiful. The cold-cream, the shining silver brushes, the perfumes in their pale, aristocratic bottles, all these things helped her mother. . . .

"Dagmar!" (In the middle west this name is pronounced as it is spelled.)

The child at the dressing-table was undisturbed, calmly refusing to be reprimanded. She continued imperturbably to finger her mother's powder jar. Forgetting her, Margaret Hallowell went on: "What are people saying, Miriam? tell me frankly. So soon; yet what am I going to do? . . . Dagmar, you are not to touch that perfume!"

Dagmar looked at herself in the mirror across the dressing-table and wondered what Gladys would say if she found out that her hair was not naturally curly. It would be quite awful. Gladys's nurse brushed and brushed her hair every Monday morning. "Because," Gladys had told Dagmar, "it's all right to put your hair up on curlers just for Sunday, but people think you are awful if you do it on week-days too, unless it's natural. My! I wouldn't let my hair have a single kink in it on week-days for anything!" Dagmar was uncomfortable whenever she thought about it. Still, she didn't have her hair put up every night, so perhaps it was almost naturally curly.

". . . and where will you find another man like John Patlock?" Dagmar took note of the grown-up conversation.

"I'm going to call him Daddy," she said, contributing casually. She dreamily lifted the stopper from the perfume bottle and rubbed it against her nose.

"Dagmar Hallowell," said Margaret, letting the underlying turbulence of her talk with Miriam Thorpe seize Dagmar like a powerful and angry undertow, "I told you, you were not to touch that perfume. Put it down at once."

Dagmar sniffed the perfume leisurely, thinking of John Patlock. "Well, when he's my father, I guess

he'll give me everything I want, pretty near," she went on.

"Dagmar, will you stop playing with that perfume?" A note of hysteria had entered her mother's voice.

Dagmar rubbed the stopper on her dress on its way back to the bottle. Margaret stamped her foot. "You're getting to be so naughty! I'm going to punish you hard one of these days." Her voice rose with all the strength of suffering nerves. "You naughty, naughty girl; come away from that dressing-table!"

Dagmar surveyed her mother with exquisite poise. "My," she exclaimed, "you frighten me, Margaret. I don't know when I've been so scared."

The two young women laughed. One of them uttered the age-old platitude about the modern child, and Dagmar pleasantly wondered if she couldn't think of something else clever and amusing to give them. She began to be a decided nuisance. "Go and see what Herbie is doing," said Margaret.

"Oh, I know what he's doing," answered Dagmar. "He's down in Paul's study scaring himself with Paul's ghost!"

Margaret burst into tears. Paul had been her husband, the father of Dagmar and Herbie, and had shot himself in the study not six months before.

"That's what comes of not having a nurse," sobbed Margaret. "They hear the most dreadful gossip——"

"Don't cry, Margaret," begged Dagmar. "Don't cry, sweet Margaret. Herbie is a naughty boy, and I'll go make him stop at once." She set off importantly, while Margaret Hallowell allowed her old friend to soothe her.

A tawdry magnificence brooded in the old hallway with its wide spaces, its arches, and its great upward reach to the balconies of the third floor. Dust-covered piles were everywhere—books, clothes, misplaced furniture, torn newspapers. Garments, ripped to be made over by a sewing woman weeks before, lay accumulating their share of dirt beside the open, dust-swallowing sewing-machine. Sewing table and machine had been moved out into the hall when Aunt Etholla decided to move into the sewing-room. Dagmar walked along through it all, switching her skirts. To her, things had been this way "almost forever," for she was already referring to the days before the death of her father as "When I was a little girl of five." Aunt Etholla's thin high voice came from the bed in the sewing-room: "Dagmar, will you bring me a glass of water?"

Dagmar pretended not to hear but went on down the wide, dusty staircase in search of Herbie. He

was not in the room that had been her father's study, and not in the long-unused room off the hall beyond. "Herbie!" she called, "Herbie!" through the great expanse of hushed, lonely rooms, rapidly graying with twilight.

There was no answer save for the silent, inscrutable answer of the great high ceilings, the mystery of the awe-compelling quiet of the smoky receding walls. A portrait of her grandfather, Charles Montgomery, gazed down with its accustomed look of amusement from the shadows. Grandfather's room! Next to father's room! The wing of the dead! For this part of the house had scarcely been entered, save by the children, for weeks. She shuddered, and called frantically, "Herbie, Herbie," wanting to run, yet held by the thought of her young brother. She clinched her fists and ran around an ell, half expecting to see him lying dead there; but her fright suddenly vanished as she came upon him, squatting, silent, very much alive with wide-open babyish eyes and a blank expression on his face. He was five, but very large for his age, and still unable to talk plainly; the gossips said he was overdeveloped physically and underdeveloped mentally. Dagmar stopped in front of him angrily: "Herbert Hallowell, why didn't you answer me? What are you sitting there by yourself for?"

"I'm fordettin'," said Herbert, "so I tan sdare myself adain!"

Dagmar remembered her errand. "Well, it's very naughty to scare yourself about father. Margaret cried when I told her. You are not to do it again. Now, then, come with me."

Herbert took her hand obediently and they walked through the big rooms together. At the threshold of the study, he shrieked and threw himself on Dagmar. It was not very successful, for he had not quite forgotten that the long, flimsy curtain, grayed by a season of dust, and slightly swaying in the draft of an imperfectly set window, was not really Paul's ghost. He frightened Dagmar a little and they raced to the bottom of the stairs, arriving breathless and panting to come up behind Zedda, the maid.

They mounted silently, conspirators, in the hope of frightening Zedda, who was dull-witted as well as near-sighted. Dagmar took two steps at a time, in a tremendous slinking movement, much envied by Herbie.

"Who's that?" Aunt Etholla's voice crept into the corridor like a little living complaint. "It's me," said Zedda.

"Uh-oh!" a delicate groan came from Aunt Etholla, exquisitely suffering, unheeded by her sister Margaret, by Dagmar, by Herbie, even by Zedda—

for the groan attempted to implicate the heavy-witted maid, though unsuccessfully. "No one's been near me all day. I can hardly speak. I need water!"

"Yes'm," said Zedda. "You want me to git you glass water?"

"Yes," moaned the thin voice, as the invalid turned her thin figure restlessly. "Yes, Zedda. If you please, Zedda."

"Well, maybe, I kin," said Zedda doubtfully. She went on to Margaret Hallowell's room and stood in the doorway. "You see, I was supposed to git tea to-day, Mrs. Hallowell. There ain't nothin' to git!"

Margaret broke from an absorbing narration. "I haven't sent in my order to the grocery. What a nuisance!"

"Don't bother with tea, Margaret," said Miriam, who, tired and hungry from a long, hard afternoon had been waiting eagerly for tea to be brought up.

"Just bring up tea and thin bread and butter, Zedda," said Margaret hastily.

"We're all out of tea, I told you yesterday, and there ain't no bread," said Zedda imperturbably. She turned and walked back to get the water for Etholla.

"Please don't bother," entreated Miriam.

"To think that Mollie would go off and leave us

after all these years," said Margaret. "I'm nearly crazy with all this work." Yet she did not go to the telephone and call up her grocer. "It shows that there is no such thing as gratitude. Why, that cook has practically run this house since mother died, and she cried as much when father died——"

The children burst in. "Can we have tea, too, Margaret?" demanded Dagmar. Herbie threw himself on the bed.

Miriam shook her head sympathetically at Margaret. "I should think you'd sell your soul for a nurse."

Herbert burst into loud blubbering tears. "Oh, goodness!" exclaimed Margaret. "Now, you've started something. He cries whenever we mention Frieda. It just shows. I would have sworn that Frieda was devoted to the children——"

"Margaret, Margaret," said Miriam in tones of exasperation. "You don't expect servants to remain when you can't pay them."

Since her husband's death they had had one servant in a house with twenty rooms. They did not live; they camped. Margaret's room, the nursery, the kitchen, and a small reception-room down-stairs were islands in that huge house, from which they travelled back and forth. In between, dust spread over the accumulation of six months; and the chil-

dren ran shrieking about the ghostly rooms, startling rats, displacing cobwebs, while Etholla lay on her bed and moaned about the villainy of Paul Hallowell in speculating with her money, and Margaret spent herself in emotional tears for her dead husband while she practically made up her mind to marry the rich John Patlock.

Nothing went on in that huge gray-stone pile but the nightly visits of John Patlock. And the town waited, suspended, to be horrified at the news that she was going to marry him before her husband had been dead six months. The drama of the sweeping away of the fortune Charles Montgomery had left to his two daughters, Etholla and Margaret, followed closely by the suicide of the guilty Paul Hallowell, was not enough. The gossips waited breathlessly titillated by the several interesting moral debates: Resolved that Margaret Hallowell should forget her worthless husband and marry again. Resolved that Margaret Hallowell should remain true to Paul in spite of his crime.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CURLED AND WEALTHY DARLINGS

"The children, Dagmar and Herbie, shall be brought up to be very precious, very precious," Grandfather Montgomery had said, tracing a gesture, suggestive of the decadent Romans — an elusive movement, apparently effortless, and very characteristic of him. "My own children," he would sigh, "were always crude"; and then he would breathe gently—"their mother's influence."

It was just after the birth of Herbie that he pronounced this resolution. The children were utterly dependent on him, for Paul Hallowell had been penniless. "Money doesn't matter, it doesn't matter," the charming old Montgomery had said, when his daughter married; and added: "Margaret has always been my little crooked kitten, and now she has caught a crooked mouse, so we'll all live together in our little crooked house!"

Margaret brought her little crooked mouse home and installed him in a suite of rooms. Paul Hallowell was a very whimsical mouse, indeed, for he was six feet tall and, into the bargain, gangling. "A brilliant young chap," Grandfather Montgomery had often told his friends. "Doubtless he will bring

countless laurels into the family. I expect him to discover the answer to some of these questions which are causing such agitation in the breasts of the hurrying young; a chemical compound, the locale of hades, or something of equal importance."

That the young invariably hurried was a convenient theory of Grandfather Montgomery's, carrying the implicit picture of a once-energetic Charles Montgomery, and excusing him honorably from continuing the unpleasant exercise since he had yielded gracefully to the years.

There was a crepuscular grandeur playing in the corridors of Grandfather Montgomery's mind, and he had an ambition to have both of his daughters living with him in the house, each installed with a family in her own suite. When Margaret married the young Paul Hallowell, she was duly given three rooms of her own; a room was added when Dagmar arrived, and another one when Herbie came.

Grandfather Montgomery then moved down-stairs into a room in which the family never breakfasted, but which was called The Breakfast Room. It looked off over the bluff and down the river, and had been his favorite spot for many years. Besides, it saved climbing stairs to sleep down there. It was in this room that the children's dim memory placed their grandfather, and here that his portrait looked

down from the walls; here that he had hoped to exert his precious influence on their lives, and here that he had died. And now to the children he was less vivid than their father, whom they called Paul, and even he was fast losing his sense of reality to them in the more dominating figure of his own ghost.

For not Grandfather Montgomery, not even Paul Hallowell, to whom the management of the remains of the Montgomery fortune had naturally fallen when Grandfather Montgomery died (leaving with characteristic negligence no will), was to exert any influence on the children. John Patlock, rapidly risen John Patlock, brought in his money, his presence to the old home, and to the children of Margaret Hallowell. It was John Patlock who taught the children to say "Daddy"—their own father had always been Paul to them. He, who lay on his back on the floor and let them climb over him, shrieking with delight, for Paul had never played with them. John Patlock it was who would run gaily to the piano, tossing out doggerel rhymes in Dagmar's honor:

> "Dag-mar! You are my bright star!
> You're your daddy's little girl!
> Sugar Plum, you got me going some——"

"Heavens, John!" Margaret would look up from a book with deprecating brows. John would flush and turn from the piano, while Dagmar, clapping her

hands and dancing about, would beg him to go on.

John Patlock told them stories, too. Telling stories was much nicer than having them read out loud by a nurse, because you could always find out the most interesting things that you wanted to know by asking questions. And then there were John's invisible overshoes. They were magical and whenever he went out of the doors there they were, he said, on his feet keeping them warm and dry even in the coldest winter weather. They had been given to him by Prince Vladimer.

Prince Vladimer and Dagmar had millions of secret adventures together that not even John Patlock knew about. The Prince was away at the wars most of the time and Dagmar wrote him every day on tiny pieces of pink paper from a little pad that she had asked Margaret to give her. She made little folded envelopes out of the paper and mailed the letters whenever she could slip away from the nurse on her way to school or on her daily walk at a little low mail-box on Summit Avenue. Once she was in despair because Prince Vladimer did not get a letter from her for nearly a week. The letters accumulated in the nursery and one awful night when Aunt Etholla was having dinner with the children, she found one of them and read it.

Aunt Etholla was very fond of Herbie and some-

times had supper with the children. She did not like Dagmar, the little girl thought, and always selected her as an audience for the most unpleasant anecdotes about her father. Between Aunt Etholla and Herbie there was a curious resemblance. Something in her long lackadaisical countenance seemed reminiscent of Herbie's adenoids, which, though they had been out once, were growing in again.

"Deerest Prinz Vladimer," read Aunt Etholla with difficulty. Dagmar had learned from John Patlock how to spell Vladimer correctly. "The royel majesty has been insulting me again. I sed wate til you come back, and tossing back my goldan curls I glode down the marble halls. Pleese return soon. Your loving sweetheart, Dagmar."

"H'm," said Aunt Etholla. "Boys on your mind already. And only nine years old. Just like your mother!"

For the first time Dagmar noticed the slip of paper in her aunt's hand.

Yesterday, Dagmar thought, when I was crossing the bridge I was afraid I might slip through and go down, down, down into the water. Why didn't I? Why didn't I die yesterday before this happened? The furniture in the room suddenly blurred, though she was not crying, and she seemed suspended in nothing. Then her feet felt heavy, and something

was creeping up to her knees, something heavy and horrible—up, up, up, until she was engulfed in a flood of shame so agonizing that she unconsciously clinched her hands and raised them from her body where they hung, to beat them slowly back and forth in the air.

The green walls of the nursery, unfamiliar suddenly, closed on her, then receded until she could see once more the white, straight crisp curtains at the windows moving in slow time at the bidding of the soft summer breeze. Outside in the top of the big tree the leaves stirred with fragile intimate sighs, and the big placid eyes of Herbie, who sat stupidly at the little table with his mouth open, watched her uncomprehendingly.

She looked up at last into the long, terrible face of Aunt Etholla, wondering whether this agony was to last forever.

"A little girl like you, to be crazy about a boy!" said Aunt Etholla with scornful amusement.

And at that moment Dagmar knew that this was the most shameful thing that a little girl could do: be crazy about a boy. For nights after that she lay in bed on the sleeping porch trying not to think of Prince Vladimer and the beautiful little house they had together. For Etholla had interrupted an enchanting dream that had hardly begun, and which

had promised to last night after night for weeks. In this dream, which began the moment Dagmar got into bed and lasted until she fell asleep, she and the Prince played together at housekeeping all day long with no grown-ups about.

It seemed like a long desperate struggle to Dagmar, this not thinking about her playmate, but at last she had to confess to herself that she was too weak to resist, and the Prince came stealthily back into her consciousness, bringing with him the most delightful adventures, until finally Dagmar forgot that it was wrong to think of him.

It was only a few weeks after this incident that Margaret gave her sister a trip to Europe, which she spent mostly at watering-places, telling her history to the sympathetic semi-invalids she met and reading the new novels by Elinor Glyn and Myrtle Reed. Etholla missed Herbie and told innumerable pointless anecdotes about him: "My little nephew used to slide down the banisters. 'Well!' I said to him, 'aren't you afraid you'll fall?' 'Oh, no!' he said!" Her invariable remark at any meal was: "Father always took milk in his tea. He said the English call cream bad form!" Similar remarks filled all conversational gaps nicely for Etholla, except in confidential moments, moments of high friendship, when she would say: "A dear friend of mine once

told me that he hated fat women." She would grow very red and look slightly complacent, for in spite of her forty-five years, Etholla still thought of herself as eligible for matrimony, and held all the notions of propriety current thirty years ago.

This dear friend, she told one or two of these casual intimates, was a man whom she just couldn't bring herself to marry. "It wasn't that I didn't love him. I just couldn't somehow bring myself—" here Etholla looked unutterable lewd delicacies.

The truth was that Etholla had been jilted. Up to the age of twenty-six she had, though indolent by nature, managed to keep out of bed at least part of the day, sustained by the belief that a certain man intended ultimately to marry her.

But when, after a few halting explanations about not wanting an invalid wife, he had married a plump and energetic blonde, she had taken up the congenial life-work of family invalid.

In the early days there had been a moderate amount of sympathy for Etholla and her broken heart. Her father had said with unwonted energy that the fellow deserved to be horsewhipped, deserved to be horsewhipped, deserved to be—ho-hum horsewhipped. Mr. Montgomery, stretching himself indolently before the fire on that crisp morning twenty years ago, had had no idea of performing this

traditional operation on the recalcitrant lover himself. It was just his extreme amiability and desire to make Etholla feel his sympathy.

"Though I really can't imagine why you should care," he had gone on to say, crossing his ankles and stretching the muscles of his back like the connoisseur in comfort that he was. "It's your industry, your industry, the fatal disease of America. Here you are snug and cosy as can be, yet you feel this strange gnawing to get out of the home nest, out of the home nest. Away! Be careful, my dear girl, be careful of the modern effort to rush at things."

Etholla had been careful for twenty years now, and had rushed at nothing. The family doctor had told her, and the more unsympathetic members of her family, that just one thing ailed her: "She's lazy."

There was something peculiarly offensive to Etholla in the way he rolled the word around in his mouth and ejected it violently. It seemed to cause divers unnecessary motions of the jaw. "Layeezee!" She called in another and more sympathetic doctor. And another, and another, and then, healers and osteopaths, and chiropractors and seers. People who prayed for her, and people who pummelled her. But she remained complacently ill. The industry which the amiable Mr. Montgomery had discerned hovering, never descended.

CHAPTER THREE

SIXTEEN

"I'll die if I'm not engaged by the time I'm sixteen," said Dagmar. It was at this period and during an Easter vacation from boarding-school which she spent with Margaret and John Patlock at Virginia Hot Springs that she saved herself from the dismal catastrophe of being described as a drab blonde by having her hair treated to a henna rinse. The war was going on and her head was a jumble of Lieutenants, Captains, Jackies, Yanks, Devil Dogs. She was very patriotic, enjoying the war hysteria to the point of fainting at the news of the death of a St. Paul boy whom she had known slightly, but allowed the girls at school to believe her engaged to.

John Patlock still took her on his lap and shouted, "She's my Dagmar, she's my girl," but she was growing a tall mysterious person, whose eyes hinted nuances of mood behind their blue cloudiness.

She was sixteen, the armistice was signed, and she was secretly engaged in a priggish and disappointing way. It occurred the summer before, during the long lazy vacation while she baked herself at a place known as the lake, that year she admitted to herself

that her deepest interest lay in the five or six boys she knew who, because they seemed superior to the rest, often for trifling reasons, were classified as interesting or, in cases of extreme attractiveness, different.

She was engaged to Raymond, chiefly because he had a fraternity pin to give her. Raymond, precariously jiggling in the process of respecting Dagmar like the yolk of an egg in its albumen, was much admired by the mothers and not particularly prized by the young women of his own age. Raymond was twenty. "He's interesting because he's older," Dagmar explained.

Raymond played the ukelele and took her for canoe rides. He said things like: "Have you ever heard this one? Oh, that reminds me of a good song! Now I'll play your favorite!" But most of the time he let the canoe rest easily on its cool silky bed of water while he strummed and sang.

One summer evening, when the last florescent lights were drifting through the west and melting into the clear blue shadows, Raymond asked in a slightly whining and somewhat timorous voice what she would do if he should kiss her. Dagmar, leaning back in the inevitable but graceful discomfort of a canoe, replied with the dignity proper to an occasion about which she had spent many hours of specula-

tion, overlaid by a feeling of disappointment that it was not more romantic.

"I think," said Dagmar, "that I should slap you." She had got this from a favorite novel which had transformed her temporarily into the charming and hoydenish heroine. Regret flooded the scene with the strange deep flavor of lost beauty. If only Raymond had looked differently, if only he had commanded, if only she could melt to his kiss like those girls who in doing this on paper thrilled her unbearably. At this time she read all beauty supplements and columns of advice to persons with love problems. They all assured her that she would be correct in refusing to kiss Raymond. She wondered at a feeling taking possession of her, puzzling and interesting her, yet, because she did not like Raymond very much, she wanted to repel a little.

Raymond was dipping his fingers into the water and meditating.

"Do you administer many such slaps?"

The word administer aroused Dagmar's admiration. The conversation was grown-up and piquant. She felt elated as she answered: "No, most of the boys I have known have been gentlemen!"

Raymond was impressed. He looked ashamed. Dagmar noticed his flushed cheeks and wondered at

the quickened pulse beating in her own blood. She imagined it to be a sixth sense which she had developed and which no one else possessed, giving her a special key as to whether she interested individual men or not.

Raymond served his purpose in boarding-school and faded from her life. She remembered him always with a sensation like the forgotten taste of unpleasant medicine. But at school she wondered silently about the unfamiliar feelings he had roused in her, lying out straight in her white iron bed while her roommate slumbered across the room, or perhaps lay thinking her own secret thoughts. Sometimes she would reconstruct the scene in the canoe with Prince Vladimer leaning tenderly forward, his strong young face tense with interest in the question. She would go about her studies dreamily for days, thinking of the Prince who had come to America and was now attending Harvard University, until one day she thought of being ill and going to the infirmary to lie in peace for a few days. Puzzling the doctor, worrying the schoolmistress, it was evident that the family laziness was developing in her. At Christmas she was so far behind in her studies that her mother was advised that on account of Dagmar's fragile health it would be best for her to stay out of school the following term.

Finely wrought, chaste and sensitive-looking, Dagmar at sixteen had a heart divided in allegiance between the dream figure of her beautiful mother and that of Prince Vladimer. And over and through it all ran a splendid dream of Dagmar, grown up, doing something magnificent, which would make both of them proud of her, and would set her apart always to all people as she was now set apart to herself. Dagmar returned from school glowing with eagerness for this figure of maternal tenderness which had been magical in its power to soothe and comfort her at school.

For the first few days she followed Margaret about the house, an adoring child. The mother-and-child relation was infiltrated with an unsubstantial felicity, until the inherent selfishness of each began to reassert itself and they quarrelled like two children. Margaret at thirty-five looked ten years younger. She was absorbed in the social orbit in which she moved, and a strongly developed histrionic nature, indulged by years of ingenious scenes which contrived to put John Patlock in the wrong in most domestic disagreements, made it easy for her to drop into the rôle of the saintly mother abandoned after years of care by a heartless daughter. And Dagmar, inheriting her mother's imagination, dropped as easily into the character of the devoted child return-

ing home to the calloused, world-worn, unloving mother. Both wept honest tears; Dagmar's were passionately genuine, for she had hoped that her mother would explain many things to her that she wanted to know and stand somehow between her and the loneliness that she believed herself unique in feeling. She had imagined deliciously even confiding about Prince Vladimer, but that, in her bitterness, she could only be glad she had never done.

The quarrels and the tears passed like summer showers, leaving their mark, however, on Dagmar. The absorbing world in which each lived claimed each of them. So their touching rings met only to part with gentle explosions, like two floating disks on a languid pool in accidental collision.

In Margaret's bedroom, hopelessly out of keeping with the rest of the architecture of the house, were eight French windows, tall and dignified as eight seventeenth-century ladies entering a ballroom. They let the sun in every morning, lighting up the gray shaded to lavender, and lavender shaded to gray room where Margaret slept, her black hair an untidy mass on the pillow, and approximately fifteen articles of clothing scattered in gay and dainty patches over the painted furniture and silk cushions.

At nine each morning Margaret breakfasted in bed. She was awakened earlier to her annoyance

each day by the sound of John plunging around in the bath. The disquieting thought that he was unpleasantly bathing in cold water made her uneasy, and each morning she lay indulging in disgust as she listened to his activities at his toilet. Dozing and waking gradually, often with a bad taste in her mouth from smoking too many cigarettes or drinking too many cocktails, she would wish that she could lie in bed forever, though the sound of John talking in a loud tone in his bedroom to no one in particular caused a frown to gather between her sleepy brows.

"Suffering Smith!" why did he drawl out his h's so? "Why can't a single member of this family get down to breakfast? Lot of lazy girls in this house!"

Margaret turned over in bed. John was so dreary, so wearying. If she could only go to New York! The town was horrible in its dulness. Why hadn't she insisted on going to Europe this year? John could perfectly well afford it, she assured herself ill-naturedly.

The maid entered and put down her breakfast tray on the little enamel table that swung over her bed. At least, she thought, attacking her grapefruit with relish, they had a good cook. She began to feel better and, when the telephone rang, she

reached over and took the European phone from her table very agreeably.

It was her friend Miriam Thorpe. They talked for an hour and a quarter: The cookies had given out yesterday at Betty Hamilton's tea for the return soldiers. Really for *the boys* the Hamiltons might just for once forget their parsimony. Elsa Saunders's cloth-of-gold gown was getting tawdry. She had worn it to everything that season——

Most of it was about the desultory activities which Margaret had lately been engaging in of welcoming the soldier boys and the sailor boys who passed through town on their way home from the war. Every afternoon she lent a motor to bring a carload of them from the railroad station to the home of one of her friends, where tea was served, at which she often assisted. Young girls played violins or sang sweet little songs for the edification of the transient heroes.

When Miriam rang off, Margaret called another number, and repeated approximately everything that she had said to Miriam. This went on for another hour.

"Margaret," said Dagmar, "do you intend to use that phone all morning!" She had come into the room without knocking, in her pajamas, yawning and stretching.

"Dear me!" said Margaret into the telephone.

"Well, Anice, I won't keep you any longer. Hope I'll see you soon!" She had hurried her last words until she snapped out the last sentence, then turned to Dagmar with a grieved expression.

"Well, Margaret, every single morning it's the same thing. Not a person in the house can use the phone, and as for expecting to get a call from any one!" She shruggingly indicated the impossibility of hoping to achieve a telephone call.

Margaret was gently sad and dignified, as she always fancied herself as being with Dagmar. "I'm very sorry to put you out, dear," she said.

"But, Margaret!" Dagmar's tone was one of exasperation. "Don't you realize how hard it is in a big family for one person to be at the telephone for three hours straight!"

Dagmar exaggerated characteristically. Hoping to impress Margaret with the enormity of her selfishness, she only impressed Margaret with her own inaccuracy.

In a moment they were arguing as only two angry women can argue. Dagmar was sobbingly relating how happy she had been until Margaret's ill temper upset her, and Margaret was telling the moving but often-times repeated story of how she loved Dagmar more than any one in the world and would make any sacrifice for her. And Dagmar was understanding,

though Margaret did not say it and had never said it, that she meant that she had married John Patlock for Dagmar's sake.

They were reconciled with the agreeable tears that were part of Margaret's superabundant emotional outlet. When Dagmar had gone, Margaret sighed and went to her desk. Seating herself on the absurd gray-cushioned and panelled chair that stood before it, she wrote on some very fetching French stationery the following surprising lines:

"My dear:

"Curiously enough I am not unhappy. I have promised myself not to think of you, but perhaps I have not quite managed that. It has been three days since you telephoned and a week since I have seen you. Can you ever know how hurt I am? I think not, for you are incapable of a deep"—she hesitated with tears in her eyes and wrote—"friendship such as I have given you."

"Over and over I go in the same old round. I wish that I were a Catholic so that I could live in a cloister. There, serene from all the world and its harried activities, I would rest. Rest and dream my days away. Dreams of—many things. But—heigho—" She paused and looked at the clock, saw that it was time to dress for luncheon, and so, adding one more line—"I can write no more"—she signed

herself "M," addressed an envelope lined with paper the color of a sirloin of beef to one of the more independent young bachelors living at the University Club, and rose from her desk. She had done with the emotion, sincere while it lasted, of the letter. But now a deeper interest brought forth all her powers of concentration, for she was about to start on the art she loved, the cultivation and care of her beauty.

On her way to luncheon she stopped for Miriam Thorpe. They rolled smoothly down the boulevard, re-exclaiming the same things they had discussed over the telephone. They were launched on their day, sitting importantly, looking down casually at people on the street.

At the patriotic tea that afternoon, Dagmar, much excited by the event, stood in the crowd looking at the boys who stood uneasily about, showing broad embarrassed smiles to every one who met their glances. Many of them, by their gawky bashfulness and uncomfortable appearance, flattered their hostesses into thinking of themselves naïvely as high society. These eighteen-year-olds had come from farms and small villages for short terms in military camps. Few of them had been overseas, but all possessed the obscure dignity of potential Guy Empeys.

They listened, awed by their surroundings, tinged

with unconscious boredom, to a young girl performing on a violin. Margaret, closing her eyes as if overcome by the magic of music, opened them to say as the number was finished: "Ah, Heifitz, Heifitz!"

"Heifitz!" exclaimed Miriam Thorpe in her hearty voice. "What do you mean Heifitz!"

"Jascha Heifitz," said Margaret with a frown of annoyance between her brows. "I heard him play that in——"

"Who's he?" demanded Miriam.

Margaret's voice had a remarkable timbre of melancholy. It went out from her to ripple on alone, lonely, unheeded, to break to bits against the harsh unresponsive surfaces of people. "Heifitz," she said in her extraordinary diapason of sad tones, "is the world's greatest violinist!"

Miriam was unimpressed. She made a twisted grimace with her mouth. "Look at Dagmar," she said, "over there, talking to that good-looking boy."

"He's one of the Bennetts," said Margaret. "I didn't know he had been in the war. I must go and find out about him."

Miriam turned back to her duties of being nice to the men in uniform. "The only touch of culture, probably," she said to herself, "that the pathetic creatures will get in all their starved lives."

Sipping tea, in the uniform of the Royal Flying Corps, a young lieutenant with a wound chevron on his sleeve had looked at Dagmar with gay mischievous blue eyes, and proceeded to relate a record of heroisms in the wars never before equalled by a boy of eighteen. Dagmar was completely swayed, melted into his narrative as he went on, shaking his boyish head carelessly at her awed, low exclamations.

He had fallen, he said, from a burning plane, and wakened to an agony worse than death to find himself on an operating-table. Through grinding torture his back-bone was being wrenched back into place. . . . Dagmar's eyes blurred with tears as she looked at his firm young back. "Say, listen," he said suddenly, "that's all a fake. I've never been to war. I'm too young!"

In amazed confusion Dagmar stared at him. It had all been a game and she hadn't known it. Her wistfulness was rapidly sliding back inside of her and anger was taking possession of her visibly. "I didn't mean," he went on awkwardly. "You know, I read that in a book. I didn't think——"

It was at this point that Margaret joined them. "Well, young Mr. Bennett," said Margaret gaily. Margaret had a way of knowing all young men. "Where did you get that uniform?"

"Borrowed it for the party," he told her impu-

dently. "It's a slick party, by the way—a little dull, though. I must be going before any one else spots me."

He left while Dagmar was still dwelling in the rush of emotions that his narrative had called up. And just before dinner, while she dawdled on the stairs, still deep in them, she saw a thing which filled her young idealism with ice-cold horror.

Lester Thorpe, the husband of Miriam, had dropped in on his way home and ridden up to the house with them in Margaret's electric, as Miriam had gone on home with his car. He came in, and for a time he and Margaret had sat in front of the fire in the great hallway in a kind of intimate silence which Margaret called up in the presence of men. On leaving he had kissed Margaret, a light tender kiss, but infinitely full of meaning to Dagmar who saw it from the stairs where they had not known she was.

That night Dagmar did not come down to dinner. Instead, she lay on the window-seat in her room looking down over the valley at the flats, like a bottomless cavern filled to the brim with folds of soft gray smoke. The lights were already twinkling in a hundred homes, coming up invincibly through the mist as if challenging the darkness.

Chill with misery, Dagmar sought for an explanation of her mother's kiss. Perhaps she has fallen in

love with Mr. Thorpe and can't help herself. Perhaps they are going to elope. She swelled with pity for John. Ought she to tell him? But she shrank from that.

At last she crept into bed. Perhaps, after all, it meant nothing. But she knew better. Her body twisted in bed, thinking how horrible it was, how unnatural and repulsive. She loathed Margaret and sprang to her feet in the darkness of her bedroom. The feeling in her was as unbearable as seeing one's dearest possession burned. If only something would give her back her mother.

She flung herself on the window-seat again and looked out over the low ruffled sea that the valley below her was, each wave touched unevenly with phosphorus.

A peace came to her as she thought: "After all, I'm only a silly little girl. I don't know anything. I ought to trust my own mother." Then the thought came to her: "Did I think Margaret was bad?" She rejected it with the violence that meant she had been subconsciously thinking this. The world seemed unclean again. Beneath her was a chasm like the valley out there, deeper than the valley. Looking out, she imagained it to be bottomless and strung with a filet of lights, over which she must dance like a tight-rope walker on her perilous journey

through life. From point to point of the golden network, sickened every moment with the awful dread of falling.

She leaned against the hard cushions and closed her eyes. Suddenly it was daylight, early morning; and she was walking, bright with the lightness of happiness, over a grass-grown plane. Ahead of her was her destination, a lovely spot hidden by blooming lilacs, and she pushed confidently toward it. Parting the flowering bushes, she emerged to a hard sandy table which dropped into a valley, a deep black valley; and five feet down, with his feet on the outjutting branch of a tree, she saw the boy she had met at tea that afternoon. He looked at her with young imploring eyes, and she saw that he was clinging to the sandy top of the cliff with all his might, unable to get sufficient hold to pull himself up.

In a moment she had clasped him by the forearm and he had put his arms up to grasp her. They looked with anguish at each other and she knew suddenly that the branch on which he stood was breaking. Slowly, slowly it cracked and in one more moment he would have nothing to keep him from falling but her arms. "You cannot hold me, said his eyes, but will you come with me?"

Go down into that black horrible place? Why,

this was the edge of the world! If she went she would never walk again on that bright pleasant hill-top. "Good-by, then," said his eyes, and before she could make up her mind his clasp had loosened and he had plunged.

Oh, why didn't he wait one moment more and she would have known! She wanted to go down, and down, and down, clasped in his arms. With a shriek which woke her she plunged after him, and sat trembling and blinking, erect on the hard window-seat, wondering and troubled by her dream.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXPERIMENT

"The question is," said Dagmar to herself, "do they like you better if you do or you don't?"

She sat, cross-legged, on a big chair in front of the fire gravely considering it. On her lap lay a magazine containing an explanation, only partially satisfactory, yet bringing some balm, of her mother's behavior. A nation-wide publicity was being given to what was called the flapper. Stories and articles were being written to prove that all girls of this day were astonishingly different from any girls born in any previous age. Dagmar held such a document in her lap. It said that these girls, among other surprising activities, actually kissed men.

"Men seem to like Margaret," reasoned Dagmar. "And she does." Her physical repulsion to the idea was dying slowly. Margaret had always been criticised, she knew, for being in the mode with the younger generation. If that was all the kiss had meant, Dagmar did not blame her mother greatly. She was proud that her mother was beautiful and fashionable. Certainly she would rather have her

be that way than like Aunt Etholla. "And I myself would rather be like Margaret than like Aunt Etholla." She nodded slowly into the fire, which spurted unexpectedly with a tiny flame, the color of gold overlaid with silver and interpenetrated with lavender. A slow excitement was taking possession of her. "I'm going to experiment and find out whether they really like you more or less if you kiss them," she thought.

This generation, Dagmar read, was for reasons, sometimes laid to the war, sometimes laid to suffrage, and sometimes to a thing called unrest, free from all the trammels that had held its grandmothers. Dagmar inferred from all this that if she wanted to be popular it would be well to step in line with her generation. And she did want to be popular. She wanted above all things to have boys like her.

Perhaps not above all things did she want this. There was in the background of her mind the tremendous personal achievement that lay in the world waiting for her, which she would some day happen upon and perform. For this she would receive an unlimited supply of laurels and would be cheered with unceasing violence which would remain always in her life like a shout echoing through corridor after corridor of a mammoth cave. Sometimes she dreamed of herself before a vast acclaiming audience.

If she could only go on the stage and call herself Dagmar Dauntless, or something striking. She thought that she would select some color—say, red or purple, and never dress in anything else. Once she had a brilliant scheme which she was sure would make her into a popular actress overnight: she would always dress in a Mephistopheles costume. For the street, a black one, severely tailored with the cape short and jaunty, and horns coming out of a small flat hat. A red-velvet one for afternoon teas, and in the evening striking gowns of red or black with floating tulle or spangled net for capes, and a head-dress with horns, all carrying out the idea of a devil. A wonderful way in which to attract attention, Dagmar had confided to Margaret, who had agreed, but still sent to London for plain English school dresses for her.

"I am changing," thought Dagmar seriously. "I am no longer the girl I was. I used to be so sweet and pure!" She sighed as she thought of her tremendous sophistication. "I am on the bridge now where the brook and river meet. The road before me divides, and I'm going to develop into one sort of girl or another presently. One sort of girl I may be may look back on these days with a shudder and feel ashamed at my silliness. Another girl I may develop into may laugh at these qualms of conscience I am

going through and think: 'Well, you were a first-class imbecile to take it all so seriously!'" A pain shot sharply at her heart as she thought of her present self lost in the future. "Oh, but I hope I never lose my sympathy for the girl I am now, no matter what I become."

A histrionic ecstasy possessed her, and her eyes filled with tears as she thought of herself so young, so unkissed, so romantically chaste: an ideal heroine. She would never murmur breathlessly at her real lover: "That's the first time I've ever been kissed." It was a great pity, a great sacrifice, but it was necessary to have boys like you. The impish face of Palomon Bennett strayed across her vision and she smiled as she thought of murmuring that phrase at him. What in the world would he do? He'd think she was crazy. No, if she let him kiss her he must never guess he was the first one.

Imperceptibly her thoughts drifted to the afternoon before, when she and Pal had walked slowly across the room in which she sat, swinging hands. She felt the rush of the warm air as they came in from the matinée, the heat of the bright crackling fire, the spacious welcome of the old mellow hallway, and in her mouth she fancied again the taste of the little cakes they had had for tea. The soft winter light had fed the window with its dying rays, and

tinged the fine old rugs with the life that all the room seemed to have possessed. The books looked down smilingly from the tall white shelves like gracious grenadiers stationed to watch the charming love episode of a queen. And the hothouse flowers in the fat high vases expanded and glowed with color almost artificial, like the smooth face of a sixteen-year-old garnished with rouge.

And she and Pal, with joined hands, had walked with a certain tender young merriness across the room to the door. She smiled as she remembered that he had drawn her hand up to his lips and she had pulled it away, saying, that a man should always bend over a woman's hand.

"The respect theory sort of dwindles and dwindles," said Dagmar, reflecting that he was coming to see her again that afternoon. "And if I do let him, and he should lose his respect for me it won't matter as much as if he were a St. Paul boy, because he's going back to his mother in Chicago pretty soon anyway."

This thought was depressing in a blurred, almost unrecognizable way. She got up and went over to the window and stood looking out. Motor-cars in their incredible busyness hustled by on the avenue. In the dull February air the houses across the street were dumb-looking, as so many tombstones. "This

is a dull town," thought Dagmar. "They ought to take me south or some place. It's bad for my health this weather." She went back to the fire and curled up once more, this time in two huge comfortable chairs. She lay dozing and dreaming the rest of the morning, untroubled by any desire for activity, conscious that she was staying out of school that winter to rest.

"In the interest of science," wrote Dagmar a day or two later, to her friend, Ann Orr, at school, "I have allowed myself to be kissed. I told you I had decided to try this experiment on Pal, who is *terribly* attractive. Well, my dear, I did.

"The main thing I wanted to know, of course, was —did a boy like a girl worse or better when she *let him kiss her.* My dear, I can't wait to tell you. Pal is the kind that needs to work for what he gets. He appreciates it more if he has to work for it.

"So one night when he came, I let him *hold my hand,* and the next time he came, I didn't. That mystified him. I think it's a woman's duty to be sort of mysterious. And when he came to say good night he fought strenuously to keep the ground he had gained—*to kiss my hand.* I let him do it. That night he proved he had not lost his respect for me by asking me to a party. Margaret would not let me go. She says I am too young, darn it."

Dagmar sighed as she let herself down for a moment from her overpowering emotion, then took a fresh grip on her pen and hastily wrote nine pages of conversation between herself and Pal, overcast slightly with not quite truthful flattery from Pal to her. Not that she put any falsehoods in Pal's mouth, but the interpretations of pauses, the overemphasis of certain phrases, conveyed, not so much to Ann Orr, who, of course, saw through it, but to Dagmar herself, a highly satisfactory romantic episode. And this was in spite of the fact that she had tried to give it a scientific cast. ". . . tell me now, I said." This was page twelve. "He said he would tell me some time, that it was awfully nice, but he didn't know how I would take it if he told me now. He was caressing my hair with his cheek. His lips were only about three (crossed out and two written above it)—inches away from mine. I lifted mine about one inch and he kissed me."

Dagmar stopped and gnawed her pen rapturously. After all, perhaps she ought not to write and tell Ann about it. "Already you are slipping," she told herself sternly. "You must not fall in love with a mere experiment." But it would be rather nice if she fell in love with Pal. Then her first kiss wouldn't be wasted. She could go back to those old dreams again in which Prince Vladimer had exclaimed some-

thing like, "Oh, God, at last, at last," when her first kiss slipped from her lips to his. Pal, she reflected, had said nothing. All he had probably thought was: "Well, I've kissed her." She knew that she had thought nothing but: "Well, he kissed me." They had stood looking at each other with shy little smiles in bewildered emotion, waking them to slight dizziness.

"Pal," she went on, "has liked me ten times as much since! This morning he sent me a huge bunch of the most gorgeous roses I ever saw." She had no sense of dishonesty in describing an ordinary florist's order of a dozen roses in this way. She was very happy as the scene of the arrival of the flowers that morning presented itself. John Patlock's hearty teasing remarks, Margaret's quizzical surprise in which Dagmar fancied a newly interested maternal approval.

It was a great discovery to have made: that boys liked you better if you kissed them and did not lose their respect for you. After all, it would be best to send the letter on to Ann, because it would be selfish to keep this discovery all to herself. At this time she looked at all girls on the streets, the women she met in her mother's drawing-room, speculating as to whether they knew this secret. She classified them all as Aunt Etholla's or Margarets and was glad

that she had definitely decided upon being a Margaret.

Days and nights were permeated with the presence of the handsome blond boy Palomon Bennett. Mornings were long dreamy luxuries in which the Pal of the night before became even more real as she relived the conversations and incidents of his visit. Afternoons and evenings when she did not see him were so much blurred scenery passing before her eyes, while his image stood always beside her, and she introduced him into conversations in a way to rouse caustic comment from Aunt Etholla.

"I don't care," said Dagmar, when she had not seen the young man for three days, and was therefore doubly eager to talk of him, "I like Palomon Bennett."

"Like him," answered Etholla bitterly. "I think you do! Any one can see, without trying, that you are crazy about him!"

Dagmar felt the old sense of shame descending over her. She went up to her room and sat thinking doubtfully. Etholla's remark had crystallized an increasing sense of depression, for Pal had not telephoned her for three days. After all, after all, had the experiment been a success? Never had she been so happy as in these last weeks, happy in her love which was not returned, said a biting inner voice.

The dull blue sky had been suddenly infused with a sullen gray. The first rain of the season began unexpectedly and violently to fall. On the roof over the kitchen Dagmar watched the threadlike water, thickening here and there to glassy ropes, plunge, to rise elastically in feathery explosions. In the distance the valley looked newly washed and strikingly distinct in contrast to the muddy, unhappy-looking sky.

Cheapness. That word, divined from Aunt Etholla, in some way made its triumphant path into Dagmar's consciousness. Every one knew that she was crazy about Pal, and Pal was not in the least in love with her. This, as she sat there brooding, became a living certainty to Dagmar. She loved Pal, she had kissed Pal. He did not love her, he had laughed at her secretly. For no definite or concrete reason Dagmar accepted the agony of this conclusion with an utterly tragic emotion which lay over her unconscious conviction of its untruth with deep confusing strength. Solely because her aunt had pricked an uneasy bubble of poison, lodged in her system by the effect on her temperament of three days of neglect, she became suffused with bitterness and watched the slowly lengthening strands of water rebounding with the rhythmicality of jugglers' balls from the roof, more solid now that the rain was

lessening. She had forgotten all her new philosophy, forgotten that she had renounced the image of herself as the pure unkissed maiden. She was lost utterly in her old idea of herself: a self who had acted in an unspeakably cheap way. She wept to think that though she had given Pal what she mentally phrased as her all, he in return had given nothing. He had never uttered one tense satisfying phrase such as she had dreamed of; he had been callous, horrible. "God, you sweet thing," Prince Vladimer had said on more than one occasion, "I adore the ground you walk on, I worship the air you breathe." Pal had never even uttered one tame, I love you. That he had never thought of her seriously was evident. Why, he had never even mentioned marriage!

Dagmar, the modern flapper, Dagmar the hard-boiled egg, was forgotten as Dagmar tearfully slipped over to her writing-desk and began a letter:

"Dear Pal:

"I feel so bewildered, like a small child that cannot find the path among a lot of horrid trees and bushes. You, being the last person in the world that any other girl placed in my situation would dream of confiding in, I have perfectly determined to tell you all about it.

"I have hit the sawdust trail and seen the light. What a stupid person I have been, until suddenly my eyes became opened!"

This much had gone smoothly enough, and had soothed Dagmar somewhat. Perhaps she wouldn't send the letter, but it would do her good to write it, anyway, she thought.

"Some time ago I decided that I had better be kissed. It discouraged me terribly to think that I was unfashionably still sweet sixteen, and so forth. . . . So I tried and tried and tried to let somebody, but I somehow couldn't." Here Dagmar wrote very fast, with flushed cheeks, as she always seemed to get along better in the realm of pure fiction. "It was the most irritating thing in the world to my experimental nature. I am so horribly squeamish about those things. I led innocent youths on to believe that I was madly in love with them only to snub them abominably when they tried to touch me. I snubbed them against my better judgment.

"As you know, you solved the experiment for me. Why I picked on you is an awful mystery to me. It is all so awfully cheap. I am not like that. It humiliates me terribly when I think it all over now. I realize that I have been awfully common, and I

cannot imagine what in the world you must think of me."

"D." was her intriguing signature to this letter, which she sat fingering pensively for some time, making up her mind to send it. It seemed to her a very amusing and somewhat daring epistle. If he did not telephone to her that night, she would know then that he did not like her, and would send the letter.

The next afternoon, as she had heard no word from him, she walked slowly down Summit Avenue, past three mail-boxes and finally, with a frightening courage that seemed to weigh down on her until she felt as if she might bend in two, she dropped it into the mail-box.

It was unanswered. In a day or two she heard that he had gone back to his home in Chicago. For two weeks she was heart-broken, but gradually her imagination was again fired by exaggerated stories of girls slightly older, and for the two years before she came out she was the victim of the calfish sophistication of her generation, drinking cocktails, complacently being kissed, and (aping Margaret who followed the older tradition of throwing a tragic veil of romance about herself) she would recite the story of Paul Hallowell and her vanished fortune.

Herbie, that summer, was the depressed companion of a tutor. Already a year beyond the age when most boys were in high school, it was imperative that he enter a college preparatory school that autumn. He was now, at fifteen, grown taller than Dagmar, a big mysterious animal who liked to lie long hours on the beach in the sun by himself. "What are you thinking about?" some one asked him one day. "I'm just supposing and supposing," he answered. And after that he was the unhappy victim of boyish jeers: "Been doing much supposing lately, Herbie?"

His unpopularity was a curious anomaly in that family with its outstanding social talents.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEBUT

Two years later, when she was nineteen, Dagmar finished school and came out. Not much prettier than any girl picked at random from a crowd, all men called Dagmar a beauty and exuded a silent atmosphere of faint contempt when other girls tried to bring up Dagmar's henna rinses and eyebrow pencils against her. For Dagmar was one of those girls who not only take joy in attracting men, but actually do disturb almost any atmosphere charged with the presence of even one male. She was the sort of girl of whom her feminine acquaintances say: "She's all right until a man comes around!" With the aid of a box of rouge, a lipstick, and, on fitting occasions, an eyebrow pencil, she had made out of her only moderately pretty countenance, an utterly lovely dew-on-the-budding-rose face which went very well with her fashionably slight and boyish figure.

Next to her talent for attracting men, which was a plain gift from God, and had only been slightly augmented by Dagmar's efforts, her outstanding characteristic was a tremendous incapacity for work of any kind; and on account of those nebulous dreams

and desires for perfection which in young girls are called ideals, a poetic, if intermittent, warfare went on in Dagmar's soul in which the element of indolence almost always won.

At Dagmar's coming-out party, Margaret Patlock observed with some delight and a dash of jealousy what she thought was an expertness of selection in her daughter, who seemed to have separated a certain millionaire newspaper owner named Willard Freeman from the rest of the eligible beings disgustedly sipping tea there that afternoon. It was late enough in the fall to make it necessary for this, Margaret's first function of the season, to be lightened with imitation yellow candle-light, which modulated the old house to a pleasing harmony of soft gray tones.

In a babel of women's light voices, Dagmar would often forget the scene before her and live for a second in a splendid scene of her imagination, colored almost always by a light novel she had been reading. In retrospect, or in the future, she could infuse almost any event with tingent pastels and gilded shadows until it partook of some of the glamour of the romance she craved. And once, when one of those particularly sentimental and sensational revelations of the younger set was having its day of popularity, Dagmar said: "It's just like my life. Now I know

that I am not the only girl who has done foolish things. Sometimes I've been so depressed about myself, but since I've read this book . . ."

But this afternoon with Will Freeman, unexpectedly attentive, Dagmar had no time for one of those delightful momentary mystic scene changes. She was not greatly interested in Will, but in the back of her mind there was the pleasant thought of the sensation she would make if Will should like her seriously. Handsome and wealthy, he had begun his magnificent career of escaping debutantes several years before Dagmar was born. Margaret, watching him casually, thought of her own debutante days, when she had almost achieved him. She wondered just how nearly she had succeeded. It would be interesting to know. He saw through me, she thought with a tinge of respect. So few men seemed to be able to do that. It had been all for the best, no doubt. That mysterious instinct, which persuades all of us that events definitely in the past had been all for the best, titillated her. She sighed. It would have been more gratifying to Margaret to see that Dagmar was to be a success socially if that slight envious tang had not been there. That gently sad overtone which a woman, thirty-seven and still very beautiful, hears droning its long monotonous, mournful note when she looks on a young girl surrounded

by the adulation that she has been able to command so long. The supple body, the black shining hair, rolling up gracefully from the slender neck, the blue, youthful eyes: these were all Margaret's still; they stamped her like a trade-mark of youth. But twenty more years of it for Dagmar; and Dagmar had it, Dagmar had it, that priceless buoyant expectancy in her soul, whose semblance could only be induced in Margaret by three or four cocktails.

Suddenly there was a commotion in the hall. The voice of the untrained Finn who was assisting the cook seemed to boom all over the house. "Vell!" she heard, and again, "Vell!" and then Etholla's nervous soprano: "Oh, dear, I'm afraid I'm going to fall." As usual she had miraculously recovered from her illness at the first sign of gaiety downstairs. "Everybody left me alone," her thin voice, strangely penetrating, came through two rooms to Margaret. "Nobody but Olga left to help me downstairs. Just like Margaret. As if I wouldn't make a special effort to attend my only niece's—" and so on, her voice was lost in the conversational rumble.

Etholla in some satisfaction, since no less than three boys had deserted Dagmar to fly to her assistance, allowed herself to be magnificently led across the room to a couch which was vacated by two matrons and a timid young girl for her.

From this hastily evacuated couch, which had an intrinsic overbearing and sneering quality and was easily the strongest point in the house, Etholla began to talk about her ailments and cures, at the same time keeping a curious eye on her niece and the still attentive Will Freeman. At fifty, Willard Freeman had grayish thinning hair which had once been the color of a lion's mane and just as thick. It now clung closely to his head which seemed to be gradually soaking it in, until finally there would be no more of it, and Will Freeman, the debonair, the handsome Will Freeman, would be as bald as the day he was born. This catastrophe was still in the distance, and Will Freeman was still the traditionally irresistible and uncapturable bachelor of the town. Since his winter in India at the age of twelve he had run all over the world, coming back always to St. Paul. At the suitable age he had gone to Harvard, where he had been intimate with an incredible number of persons who had since become famous, even legendary national figures. He now lived alone in the big house on Summit Avenue that his father had built in the days when Crocus Hill was a mass of yellow, sweet-smelling crocuses in the springtime, and when the fashionable portion of the town was still down on the other side of the city. The elder Freeman had explained with a haughtiness which Will had inher-

ited, that he had moved up for the view over the Mississippi flats. This valley, with its shifting moods as inconstant as the sea, was one of the reasons why Will Freeman, wander as he might over all the world, always returned each year to St. Paul. "Bay of Naples, bah!" Will would say, sipping contentedly his high-ball from the terrace of his home. He alternated during his periods in the city between the wearying life of the most popular bachelor in town, and times when he shut himself up and refused all invitations. The paradoxical idea prevailed, especially among the women, that on these occasions Will was sulking over a love-affair.

"I was at Wiesbaden for a clinic," Aunt Etholla was saying, "and really the German doctors can teach us a lot. They put this mask over my face and there was a little electric fan at my side that blew through the soft cloth of the mask and I could see everything, but the doctors couldn't see my face. And, well, they just did everything to me. I had this electric globe up inside of me for half an hour, and really I would have been terribly embarrassed if I hadn't known that these doctors wouldn't ever recognize me again because you see they couldn't see my face. Well, my dear, the most peculiar thing was wrong with me. Did I ever tell you about it? Oh, I must tell you then"—her body hitched forward

several inches and she actually achieved a note of enjoyment. . . .

A stir of new interest was apparent among the women. They began to babble. "Yes, these clinics are really terrible things," another middle-aged maiden was saying. "Why, I went into one and right in front of three or four doctors there I was without a stitch of clothing on. I was frightfully embarrassed. . . ."

"And the doctor said to me as I was lying there on the table trying to hitch this perfectly inadequate sheet around me: 'Is this Mrs. Pound?' I said 'Yes,' and he said, 'Have you any children, Mrs. Pound?' and smiled. I said, 'Yes, I have two children,' and he said, 'Ah, both boys, I suppose, Mrs. Pound. Lift your right knee a little——' "

"Oh, it's ghastly . . . but they get so used to it, those doctors, they really don't think anything of it."

"I have had six children and been to the hospital for a couple of operations, but I'm still ridiculously modest about things like that."

But it was Etholla, who had detailed her experiences at Wiesbaden steadily throughout the discussion, who said the last word:

"I'm so modest I can't bear to even *discuss* things with my doctor!"

In Margaret some scheming instinct of shadowy grandeur was thinking that it would be a triumph if Dagmar could marry Will Freeman. She visualized for an instant a more glorified afternoon, with Dagmar entering, flushed and starry-eyed, from St. Margaret's Church, beside Will Freeman, lately invulnerable. A maternal tenderness rose in her and she longed for a sentimental chat with Dagmar, in which she addressed her daughter as Childie and Dagmar called her "Mother."

"Must you go?" . . . "So sweet of you, my dear!" and a number of "Really's" were for fully five minutes Margaret's conversation as she thought of Dagmar and Will. But her musings were suddenly interrupted by the stridently sugared voice of her sister Etholla who, in one of those sudden lulls which sometimes occur in a chattering assembly, had boomed a remark, meant to be merely cattily conversational, all over the company: "I agree with you," Etholla had been saying when the lull occurred. "From the way she's holding on to Will, it seems to me that Dagmar likes him very much."

There was an atmosphere in the room of a hundred titters writhing in their silent death agonies before the sea of conversation mercifully rose and flooded the room again.

That year Dagmar danced in the Junior League

Show, and the younger married men meeting her casually on the street or in semi-public places would say to her quizzically: "It won't be long now until we hear of you on the stage!" Dagmar, too, thought it would not be long. The boys her own age were stricken with a kind of awe whenever they thought of her future greatness as a dancer, for Dagmar had that quality of inspiring faith in herself so strongly that many people who had never seen her dance said of her: "That Dagmar Hallowell now, there's a girl who is going to be something some day!"

This glory finished off Dagmar's first season and hung as a somewhat dazzling glow throughout the summer and into her second season. And still she was having a good time, feeling faintly bored and filled from time to time with longings to be away, to be doing something; longings that were easily diluted by the prospect of a more magnificent party which was always coming off next week. For events in the future held a larger magnificence always than remembered good times, even the most brilliant of them.

In the fall she thought perhaps she might begin to study or go East and try to get into one of the New York shows, but she was still too much in love with having a good time, and though she had adopted the habit of her generation of being bored with every-

thing, she still went to each new party with enormous gusto.

And so she got through the winter, which was interrupted for the family only by the advent of Herbert on three separate occasions; each occasion being his ejection from three different preparatory schools. By spring he had been fired from a St. Paul High School and was a depressed attendant of the St. Paul Academy, where he could be seen on pleasant days walking with his long solemn face and parted lips among boys only a little more than half as high as he was, like a long, mournful milkweed sticking up out of a carefully clipped hedge. "How's the air up there?" his companions would jeer, and the apathetic Herbie seemed scarcely to mind. Nor did he mind the snickers that seemed painfully suppressed in the classroom whenever he was called upon. For, though he was seventeen, he had not yet completed his second academic year, and the fourteen and fifteen year olds in the class, many of whom were small for their age, glibly answered questions over which Herbie stumbled.

It is reported of Dagmar Hallowell that at one period of her life she stated: "When I'm grown up I'm going to be just a plain married woman." That must have been when she was about eight and going through the phase of washing dolls and airing the

cat in a miniature go-cart. For by the time she was ten this homely ambition had entirely vanished in the maze of more thrilling and brilliant futures which she felt indubitably awaited her. The social career of the well-advertised after-the-war girl, whose current absurdities were faithfully committed by Dagmar, promised more excitement and admiration than even that of an actress, and so another year went by and another Junior League Performance, it appeared, was necessary to the health of the city; the money was needed for the hospital, hundreds of girls made their yearly explanation to sceptical husbands and fathers who would insist that a donation of money would be cheaper to the giver and more valuable to the receiver.

Dagmar came to the try-out attired in her costume of the-year-before velvet breeches, a ruffled blouse, and socks.

"Well, you ready to try out," snarled the director, a fiery-eyed little Jew, apparently obsessed by the notion that George Ade, David Belasco, Edgar Selwyn, and Ring Lardner were finding it hard to get along in New York without him. The names of these celebrities and half a dozen more were constantly on his lips, and his manner to the flower of mid-western society was at all times brusque and deprecatory.

"I'm quite ready," said Dagmar with a self-assurance probably irritating to the director.

"What can you do?"

"Oh, I dance," said Dagmar easily and patronizingly. "Let me see, you'd better play—" she named a popular song, which the director, shrugging his shoulders as he swung around on the piano stool, began to fling lazily into the room.

Dagmar danced. The director eyed her sceptically. It was evident that he was more interested in his own playing than he was in Dagmar, and he was not interested in his own playing at all. He tossed the melody into the room with the aristocratic carelessness of a millionaire newsboy throwing away half-smoked cigarettes for his former associates to pick up.

"What else can you do?" he asked, when Dagmar finished.

"Well, I—I dance," said Dagmar with less assurance.

"Go on, then," said the director turning wearily back to the piano.

Dagmar, feeling uncomfortable, did her dance over again. She fancied that some of her best friends were slyly smiling at each other, and on her brow she felt a slight perspiration.

"What else you do?" implacably inquired the director.

"Just dance."

"Yeah, well let me break it to you that you're no dancer, Miss Hallowell. You're good-looking, though, and if you have any voice at all you can go in the chorus."

Dagmar fell back into the ranks. "Isn't he killing?" whispered one of the girls in her ear, but Margaret who had come to the rehearsal, rushed forward to the support of her child. "I never heard of anything so perfectly ridiculous in all my life. Every one praises my daughter's dancing. But after this I wouldn't dream of allowing her to be in the performance."

There was a chorus of protest from half a dozen young men and one or two girls. "Nonsense, Margaret, I'll be glad to be in the chorus," said Dagmar vigorously. She was badly disappointed, but not, as those obliging persons, who are always so kindly in their relation of such incidents to large audiences, said, surprised. "I was a fool to think I could dance like a professional," she said to herself.

She did go in the chorus, and the director, who was equally disparaging to almost every one else, allowed her to come on twice with a male chorus, dancing and smiling at the audience, but her dream of a stage career was blasted, and for a time she felt lost, drifting, with no harbor in sight, for always the stage

career had stood to her as something definite that she would some day do. Love, it is true, still lay in the future with all its speculatory hopes and dreams, but Dagmar did not regard marriage as an end in itself.

CHAPTER SIX

PAL

As Dagmar was getting out of the motor, she almost tripped Dorothy Wiate who had risen to follow her, by stopping short at the sight of a young man, with his overcoat turned up about his collar, and his hat pulled low on his forehead, who was coming down the street.

Palomon Bennett in the flesh was advancing toward Dagmar, a frown of annoyance shadowing his black-browed, blue eyes. He did not see her, but he was turning into the house where she was going for dinner. So she stopped short and almost tripped Dorothy Wiate. A soft drizzle came down on her hair, and nestled sighingly into the folds of her wrap. The scene was grayed and softened like a harsh charcoal drawing rubbed over with a cloth, and the lights from the houses and streets were given reflections by the wetness, and made to look like strange, glittering yellow jewels.

"You crazy?" demanded Dorothy Wiate, but Dagmar, trying to remember what he had looked like, made no response. He looked older and more handsome than she had remembered. ". . . my marcel's coming out," grumbled Dorothy. "If this weather

is going to last I'm going to get a permanent wave."

"Good idea," murmured Dagmar excitedly. She would actually be meeting him in a few moments. She wondered if there could be some mistake. She hadn't even heard he was in town.

She had neither seen nor heard from him since that day nearly four years before when she had written to him. Her heart sank a little even now at the thought of that note, but the curiosity which had animated her more than once in those four years now began to stir and simmer inside of her as she thought that at last she was going to find out what he had thought of the "experiment."

Leaning over the dressing-table to examine carefully the rouge on her upper lip, the joy that was filling her focussed suddenly to a smile.

"Practising," said Dorothy Wiate disagreeably.

Dagmar was too absorbed even to notice. "What you say?" she murmured absent-mindedly. She had suddenly realized that Pal Bennett had taken a place in her heart beside the splendid Prince Vladimer, and that she was as excited at the thought of meeting the one as she would have been at meeting the other.

He was standing by the fireplace when she entered the drawing-room. Tall, slim-waisted and—with a shock of surprise she remembered—blond!

On either side of the middle part a wave of red-gold hair rolled smoothly back. But his brows, his lashes, his skin were dark. "That's why," thought Dagmar, "I didn't remember that his hair was yellow. No, his eyes were blue, dark blue." "The effect," said Dagmar next day to Ann Orr, "is startling."

Their eyes met with the same searching, curious look. Dagmar felt his gaze sweep her cheek, her hair, her neck, with a swift secrecy as if he, too, were confirming a remembered impression. Their hands touched as he said cordially: "This is great, to see you again."

He was a little taller, a little firmer, a little older, she saw in that first moment; an image that faded in swift receding flashes into the Pal she remembered until almost immediately he seemed the same boy she had known so well four years ago. "He must be," she thought, "nearly twenty-three years old."

"I'm just up here on a flying trip," he was explaining. "They thought grandmother was going to die, but it was a false alarm apparently. She seems as hale and hearty as ever to me. Listen, Dagmar, I wish I could get a chance to talk to you before I go back. I'm supposed to be devoting myself to that large fat hussy over there in the shawl or whatever she's got on."

"As rude as ever, I see," said Dagmar.

He frowned. "I'm not rude. I'm never rude. I have to go back to Chicago to-night and——"

But the party took this moment to surge and toss them apart like pieces of driftwood in a storm. Joe Brown was pulling her arm and muttering, "Little something to tell you, Dagmar, listen here——"

"What time?" called Dagmar over her shoulder, vaguely aware that she was being led into the dining-room.

"Ten o'clock," said Pal over the heads of a dozen people, and then a long dreary dinner separated them.

She sat beside Joe Brown, who liked to be thought a knowing fellow, one who knew what was what and who was who. In consequence his gossip was often stigmatized as bad taste, and he was eternally being snubbed. At one time, having been what he called a radical, he had come to St. Paul to work for Will Freeman's paper, and was now undergoing a period in which he posed as an intellectual aristocrat and strove to enter the moneyed aristocracy of the city with all the assiduity of one who has complete faith in its genuineness.

On Dagmar's other side was Will Freeman, who was constantly put beside Dagmar these days by dozens of hostesses who were breathlessly hopeful of his being caught at last.

"What have you been reading, Will?" asked Dag-

mar, because she thought it would be nice to be intellectual a little while for Will's benefit.

"I've just finished the third volume of 'Marcel Proust,'" said Will, amusedly answering Dagmar with the sincerity he always gave her, as one says things to a child, accurately, in the belief that it will understand part.

"Oh, Prew," said Dagmar, who, as Will very well knew, had never heard of him before. "I think he's an egg, don't you?"

"Rather," said Will, smiling. Joe Brown, however, had caught the last part of the conversation. He beamed.

"Egg? Oh, yes, egg. I think that's an awfully good expression. I always use it."

Dagmar looked across the table and down and caught Pal's eye. They smiled secretly, and Dagmar thought with a sinking heart of the concert toward which they were all bent, and the ten-o'clock train which would prevent her from seeing Pal alone at all.

"Ernie Bishop seems always to be hanging around that Palmer girl," whispered Joe Brown. This was one of his countless little innuendoes that he hoped made him seem on intimate terms with the people he strove to emulate.

"She's announcing her engagement to him next

week, I believe," snapped Dagmar, who was apt to let Mr. Brown's harmless remarks annoy her.

"On a hundred a week?" asked Brown, raising his brows. "That's what he's getting, I believe." Dagmar made no comment, and he continued, raising a waggish brow: "But I forgot her grandmother. Is it true that old Mrs. Gompers gives each of her grandchildren that marries a hundred and fifty a month?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Dagmar and turned to speak to Will Freeman, but the question raised a faint unpleasant undercurrent to her thoughts. Girls nowadays almost had to have money if they wanted to marry, she was thinking, unaware that "nowadays" in that connection was a state of affairs that had existed perennially. It was true that Marie Holmes's people had given her two hundred a month to add to Roy's three hundred, and that Marian Faylor got the same sum from her parents that her husband earned, and that they increased the money whenever Kenneth got a raise at the office. Dagmar was not of the caliber which frets either openly or secretly because she is deserted for wealth. She had too much charm to ever be deserted completely, and none of the young men who had been attracted to her and gradually drifted away to girls with more money had ever attracted her enough to

cause her more than a faint ripple of annoyance. And yet, and yet, Ernie Bishop had been desperately unhappy over her not four months before, and had begged her to marry him on his twenty-five dollars a week. She had refused solely because she felt no desire to marry him, for she was determined to marry for love, though the romance of poverty did not appeal to her.

Ernie Bishop and three or four other boys who had vowed desperate things for her were now either married or on the point of being so to girls who had enough money to make at least half of the household. Supposing, just supposing, that she, Dagmar, should fall in love with a poor man? She considered Palomon Bennett across the table, his blond beauty seemed to suggest a ripeness, a plenitude that was incompatible with poverty. But supposing he were poor . . . her heart sank down within her, even as she began to think hastily of a solution of the matter, a habit as characteristic of Dagmar as it is of the age in which she lives. For to her it was unthinkable that in her young bravery she should not find an ultimate solution to any difficulty that might present itself. Though surely she was thinking she would not fall in love with a man who was poor—"If she did . . . if she did," the little teasing undercurrent of disquiet whispered, if she did, then she

would find some way out of it. She would even work herself, if necessary. There was some way that she could marry him and they could get rich. Was this handsome young man really poor?

CHAPTER SEVEN

SYMPHONY

By eight o'clock the St. Paul Auditorium was almost as full as it would be. The musicians were not yet on the platform, yet the chairs, symmetrically arranged, the bared stage, and above all the air of expectancy in the audience, were immediate precursors of their arrival. At the front of the house the first five or six rows were unoccupied, and scattered throughout were a few groups of seats which would be filled later by the fashionable portion of the St. Paul audience. At the back of the house no boxes were as yet filled, but in a box at the right of the stage sat two middle-aged Jews discussing a crisis in their family while they waited for the concert to begin.

In the balcony and gallery sat a more austere audience, which, like the down-stairs had its sprinkling of those arid individuals who go in conscientiously for higher things, that mild dissipation of the rich which becomes a dwarfing vice in the poor.

The people in the gallery, for the most part, sat staring stupidly at the roof: a variety of pastel

colors in mosaic. The electric light at the top cast a faintly unpleasant glitter into their eyes, and they shivered with cold, and drew their cloaks closer about their shoulders. The air smelled slightly damp, but not so much so as it did down-stairs, and a few of them, gazing down on the valley full of heads embosomed between the stage and the point where they sat, felt faintly dizzy.

In the outer foyer people were still assembling in line to get tickets. Girls in evening wraps with elaborately marcelled hair would stand for a moment waiting for a party, for an escort. The colors of their wraps made pleasant splotches here and there in the wet, hurrying scene of the outer lobby. Groups of women, dully clad or else in garments determinedly and disagreeably gay, stood together. And here and there were women who forgot themselves at least once during the course of every evening of gaiety and dropped into the dictatorial tones, or the patronizing manner of the schoolroom.

And babble, babble, babble, went the voices. . . . "Oh, Mrs. Peters! I heard you had come back to town. . . . Yes, yes, she's sixteen . . . He excels in tone and interpretation too. . . . I never heard of such a thing. . . . Well, well, life has its compensations; I always say that everything is evened up for everybody. . . . My dear, do come and see me.

. . . Yes, another girl, this makes five. She's so disappointed, poor thing" . . . babble, babble, babble.

Outside people in raincoats, who had come on foot, were hurrying to get in out of the drizzle. Motor-cars, along the line to the Wilder Charities and around the corner to Rice Park, were waiting for a parking place, while others, stopping in front of the Y.W.C.A. across the street, were letting out the more hardy souls who did not mind running across the street in the wet. Bigger and grander cars stopped constantly in front of the huge building and let out gentlemen in dinner array accompanied by immaculate ladies with wraps reminiscent of Oriental courts.

Among these latter persons Margaret Patlock entered the by-this-time musty-smelling outer lobby, whose floor was traced with the blurred design of a hundred muddy feet. With that self-conscious haughtiness possessed by nearly all beautiful women when they find themselves in the midst of a crowd of nondescript people, she paused for the fraction of a moment to wait for a gray-haired man with a grave, finely chiselled face, who was a member of her party and with whom she was reputed to be having what was called among her acquaintances "an affair."

The beautiful line of her neck, emphasized by a soft pyramid of black hair piled high at the back of

her head, seemed to grow out of her black cape like the stalk of a delicate flower. Her coiffure softly outlined her fragile face, in contrast to the headdress of many less studiously attractive women, some of whom looked as if their hair had been carved out of wood in imitation of a human head. Across the big lobby she looked like a beautiful and radiant girl of twenty, but the people beside her could see that she was heavily rouged, and her eyes, big and blue, glittered under a weight of too much mascara. Her skin was too thick in texture, now with its layer of make-up, for she had passed the age when the rouge melts into the flesh and seems to mingle with the warm young blood. For the faithless cosmetics which for a young and pretty girl can crystallize that buoyant excited radiancy, which is the only magnet a poor girl bent on marrying a fortune has ever had, abandon their art for the ugly woman, the sick woman, the no-longer-young woman, and leer ironically from her countenance, emphasizing the very deficiencies she is trying to conceal.

For Margaret they still had some potency. They could, for instance, make her look young again under a large hat. They could, too, make a few people think, "How beautiful she would be if she didn't paint so much"; for Margaret had passed the point where she could hope to enhance her natural charms.

Her cosmetics were now used principally as a decorative scheme and made no attempt to conform to the rules laid out by nature.

In the lobby she looked around to see if Dagmar's party had arrived. She wondered vaguely about Willard Freeman. If only he would . . . if Dagmar only could achieve the impossible and get Willard to marry her. It seemed like tempting Providence even to hope for it. It was too good. A shame, too. She sighed. There were so few wealthy men left unmarried. What a pity!

A young man with whom she was hoping to have an affair came gaily across the lobby. She crossed swiftly to him, striving to penetrate the pallid, blond, and impersonal mask with which he defended himself with a deeply personal glance. He looked at her smiling impassively, understanding that this was only part of Margaret's fun, a phase of the pastime popular among the younger married set with whom Margaret was perennially in favor. Her face was emotional with unfeigned feeling, for Margaret could only find satisfaction for the craving which gnawed her in extracting a more personal homage from the men she knew than most women got. She longed to have a romantic affair with all the ardor of a sixteen-year-old girl, and was striving always to find some partner for it among the prosaic men of

her acquaintance. Many of these men were willing to enter into a subterranean business of casual embraces, in most cases hardly even disloyal to their wives, but none of them had the taste for a great love-affair, the desire to find eternal things with Margaret, which her soul craved.

"Oh, Cyril," she breathed at him, but he merely looked down at her curiously and felt dimly glad that his wife hadn't come to the concert with him. And yet he was not averse from her advances. He was, in fact, slightly flattered and a little stirred by her, but he felt that it might be uncomfortable to become too deeply involved. He was a detached, emotionless fellow whom his friends called Cereal.

The protagonist of her current affair had by this time joined them, and three other members of the party quickly formed in a little group in the inner lobby, talking to aquaintances, nodding, waving across the long room. Dagmar's party had not come when they entered a box at the back of the house, which they did as the first creaking strains of the stringed instruments began. The melodious approach in the major to the gracious and delicate first theme in G minor hushed most of the audience. But the members of Margaret's party continued murmurous arguments and anecdotes begun before

they entered, though with a gradual slackening-down of interest.

But at the first notes of the G-minor theme Margaret closed her conversation abruptly, and, leaning slightly away from the man to whom she had been talking, closed her eyes, tautened her features, and assumed the expression of a person undergoing bliss of an extreme nature. As bar after bar ascended, Margaret seemed lost in the magic of the melody, and her breast heaved; she put her hand on her heart, and raised her chest as if to drink more and more from the melodic fount. The people with her were presumably unimpressed with her histrionic efforts, or else were genuinely absorbed in the music, but she was the only one so completely rapt that she did not turn her head at a bustle at the door, to see Dagmar and the young Palomon Bennett signalling frantically to their party which were seated down in the tenth row. In some way they had arrived too late for the first number and would have to wait until the intermission before joining their party. Many persons in the audience recognizing Dagmar, were pleasantly excited for a moment to think she would have to stand wearily inside the door for a matter of probably half an hour.

Those underground methods of communication, familiar to persons who, having the status of adults,

are still adolescent, had been employed by Dagmar and the young man to make known to each other the following facts: they liked each other remarkably well; they hated concerts; if you could manage to delay entering the theatre until after the first number was begun you weren't allowed to go in until it was over.

On reaching the auditorium, Dagmar slipped into the woman's dressing-room, where she waited until the first number had begun. Palomon mumbling something about cigarettes, managed likewise to slip away from the crowd. Both then hurried panting up to the door, and were told by chilling attendants that they couldn't go to their seats until the number was over. "You can wait inside the door, though," muttered the attendants, while Dagmar signalled frantically to the rest of the party, most of whom, being regular attendants at symphony concerts, were glad of almost any distraction to while away the moments until the music should be over, began a series of head bendings and sh-shes back and forth.

"Come on," said the boy, and they fled out the door and into the long, gloomy, deserted hallway, which stretched through the building for a block like the sombre and monotonous entrance to the cells in a prison.

"I escaped that, anyway," he said, "I have to beat it at the intermission, and I wouldn't have had a chance for a word with you if I hadn't thought of this. Lucky, Cousin Henrietta didn't have a box. . . ."

"Yeah, my mother's in somebody's box and she nearly saw me. She would have grabbed me, only she was too busy. A concert's awful on the poor thing's muscles. She's a nice woman, and a good mother, but she will pose at concerts. I do it sometimes too. It keeps me from being bored thinking up different soulful expressions. Margaret does it all the time. She always has to have an extra facial massage after a concert."

"It's her age," commented the sage Palomon. "In her generation you had to be keen about higher things to get by"—he struck a match and said abruptly: "Gee, it seems nice to see you again. What have you been doing all these years?"

"Playing around," she replied, lighting a cigarette from his match, "nothing more. What have you done?"

"Business," said Pal seriously. He began gravely to talk about himself, his work, with all the momentous significance that he seemed to think the subject merited. Dagmar, studying his handsome young face with its intent, purposeful expression,

employed the social talent at which she was adept of replying sensibly to everything he said without knowing or understanding, except vaguely, what he was talking about.

But time was passing and she reflected that it was necessary for her to know what he had thought of her letter to him before he left. So at the first break in his monologue about himself, she asked him.

His face was shaded with a vexed amusement. "That hit me hard, Dagmar," he said, laughing. "Of course I was just a kid, but I was pretty far gone for all that. And then to be told I was merely the subject of a cold-blooded experiment!" He looked at her with an amused self-possession that was, for some hidden reason, disappointing to Dagmar. "That was the trickiest thing a girl ever did to me. I'll always remember you for it."

"You really did like me then?" said Dagmar.

"Yes," he fumbled for his cigarette case, "and I must say that you shattered my ideals frightfully."

"But you shattered mine, too," protested Dagmar. "If you'd only told me that you liked me—" she accepted another cigarette and hesitated as she turned it in her fingers, "but——"

"Told you," exclaimed Pal. "That's a good one. If I remember the circumstances at all, I used to

hang around until your mother had to call the police to get me home." He sighed, uttered the hackneyed, "those were the days," and added that lately he had been so absorbed in his business that he had forgotten that a girl existed.

"Why do you work so hard?" said Dagmar. "Heavens!"

"To earn a living, my impractical and fragile young flower," said Pal. "Did you ever hear of that reason?"

"Haven't you any money?" asked Dagmar. "I'm supposed to marry money."

"You're crazy if you do," said the young man. "Honestly, I think that stuff's out of date. A clever kid like you? Hell, you could do anything."

"How could I? On the stage or something?"

"No. You know, go into business. Be a real-estate broker, or, well, anything. Go into some firm and work your way up just like a man. I'm strong for this woman stuff, do you know it? Look at half the women that are married and have plenty of money who are going in for something, interior decorating, or, well, loads of things. Look at me. I have no money, but I'm going to be rich some day. You see if I don't. No wealthy girl for me. I'm going to marry whoever I darn please, and if I were you, I'd do the same."

"There's something in that," said Dagmar. "Only it's just as easy to fall in love with a man with money, as it is to fall in love with a poor——"

He was very young, and for some reason stirred by the argument. He seized Dagmar by the shoulders, realizing as the soft velvet of her wrap melted to his palms that the contact was necessary to his comfort, and had been for some moments. "You're talking rot. You won't find your rich young lover. Poor, romantic girls never do. You watch other people. You can't have everything, and there's some fate or law of compensation or something that will keep all the nice boys away from you and shove dubs at you. Fat old dubs rolling in gold. Thin miserly old men. Millions of them, and all rich. But not one man of the kind that you could love."

Dagmar, who had turned her head and was holding herself rigidly, smiled out of the corner of her right eye at him. "One hundred per cent American," she laughed. "And out of date."

The eraser rampant is the heraldic insignia of the younger generation. "Out of date," the ultimate horror, the last dread, was being contemptuously tossed back and forth between them, as they exhibited their infant philosophies to one another. Like most young people, they fancied that ideas, centuries old, were discovered by the glib editorial writers

from whom they derived their ideals. Theories, discussed in monasteries, a thousand years ago, for which many men had lived and a few had died, were accepted or tossed aside by Dagmar, judged solely on a basis of whether she thought they were new this year or last.

"Why do you stretch your neck out that way," he asked with the intensity of interest usually displayed by a young man who is almost holding an exceedingly pretty girl in his arms. "Do you think it's alluring?"

"Certainly," said Dagmar. "I know it's alluring. It's part of my technic." She relaxed slightly and gave a long sigh, enjoying her conception of her tremendous potentialities. She had an absurd belief in her ability to trick men into liking her, loving her, and was unaware of any forces involved beyond her own cleverness.

The muscles of his face were drawn together, and his eyes appeared to have enlarged several sizes. He was totally unable to make his next remark seem offhand. "Guess I'll kiss you."

"Oh, no," said Dagmar. "Listen! The number's over. We must go back."

They stood very close, looking at each other, wanting to kiss, yet held back by a delicate and romantic exaltation that they were afraid of breaking. And

then about a dozen people turned the corner and it was time for Palomon Bennett to make the best excuses he could to his cousin Henrietta and catch the train for Chicago.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE WORKING-GIRL CHARACTERIZATION

Dagmar, being a graduate of that famous girls' school which boasts that it teaches riding and clear thinking was not too well prepared to embark on the dimly outlined but splendid career which Palomon Bennett had so enthusiastically proposed. Nevertheless the suggestion harmonized perfectly with her latent, but ever-willing-to-rise, conviction that some day she would find herself in the act of achieving something memorable and remarkable. She longed to have the curtain rise on it.

In one of her most recent day-dreams she had been a newspaper reporter mystically appearing with up-raised hand in a smart costume, at a critical moment, to discover just who the murdered man was. She saw herself surrounded by a group of envious girls who had read her writings and who were all exclaiming: "How do you do it? It must be perfectly fascinating!" This was the most practical of all her dreams because of her acquaintance with Will Freeman, who owned the controlling stock in one of the St. Paul newspapers.

The next morning she arose at the astounding

hour of nine, and, after breakfasting with the flattered John Patlock, called up Will Freeman and demanded that he let her work on his newspaper, *The St. Paul Daily Bee.*

"Good heavens, child, what for?"

"I want it. I want to work." The short sentence suited Dagmar's mood, which was that of the saddened, disillusioned young woman who wants nothing now from life but a chance to serve.

"Well—" he hesitated, "I don't interfere down in the office very much. However, if you'll lunch with me, we'll talk it over."

She pursued her way triumphantly up to her room. At last she was actually going to do something. She sank into a chair and yawned as she looked out of the window into the sun-filled morning valley.

"Good-by, Dagmar," called John cheerfully. "Good luck to the fair young working girl." He could be depended on to approve of any scheme that would lead Dagmar into the fields of honest industry where his mother had becomingly dwelt. She had, in fact, supported John in his early years by taking in sewing, and had never lived to see him rise to the altitude of marriage with Margaret Montgomery Hallowell.

"Good-by," answered Dagmar, thinking warmly of him in a vision that instantly passed.

Continually nagged, continually offending Margaret, going about his work, getting older, working faithfully for a houseful of women related to him only vaguely, pathetically interested in his radio; Dagmar thought all this in a rush of impression, finishing with the thought: "But most of all he's good."

When she said that John Patlock was good, Dagmar meant that she discerned in him a quality of stability that was not among the elegant enhancements which Margaret possessed. No, they were all descendants of Charles Montgomery, the charming old gentleman who had been at pains to shed the plebeian virtues as well as the plebeian graces. They were not the up-and-coming type. Were they the down-and-going type? inquired an irrelevant imp in her brain. "Oh, shut up," she said to it crossly, "I was thinking of Pal Bennett." Yes, he was the up-and-coming type. She settled down more deeply in her chair, sinking into the luxury of her thoughts of him.

Margaret, coming discontentedly up the stairs, decided to pay a little call upon her daughter. She threw herself on the chaise longue, lighted a cigarette, asked Dagmar if she had enjoyed herself the night before, at the same time obsessed by a sense of slight depression. Will Freeman, the desirable escaping male, being caught by this child Dagmar,

seemed a little pathetic to her, even while she rejoiced in it. Yes, they were all getting old. It was like the aged leader of the wolf pack leaping on his prey and failing to land for the first time. The story of Akela in the "Jungle Book" had always appealed to her.

"And Will?" inquired Margaret at last, when an opportunity came.

"Will is a priceless plug," said Dagmar. "I saw as little as possible of him."

Margaret was exasperated. For a minute she considered pretending that she was unable to comprehend Dagmar's slang. "I'm sure I don't know what you want," she said in her soft, sighing way. Stretched out, the slim lines of her still youthful figure were amazingly graceful and beautiful. She began to beg Dagmar to tell a social lie for her, which she felt was necessary on account of an attractive engagement looming up in the place already occupied by a less pleasing one. "You could say that I forgot, and that you were with me when I accepted," she begged, "and maybe Miriam will believe you, because she's going to be perfectly furious."

Dagmar refused and said that she was to lunch with Will Freeman, which was accepted as satisfactory by Margaret. Soon afterward they went off amiably to town in the same motor, talking the in-

cessant endless gossip, which even in their separate circles made them companions, stimulating their self-admiration by severe comments on other women.

But at luncheon Will failed to promise Dagmar a job. "Please let's just go over and look through the building, anyway," begged Dagmar. "I'm awfully interested in newspapers."

Will, under the influence of three cocktails, was being amused by Dagmar. They climbed into his car and astonished the office of the *St. Paul Daily Bee* very much by appearing as a sort of amateur touring party, gathering the business manager and the managing editor in their wake as they trailed through. Will seldom appeared at the office, and when he did his entrance was always very unobtrusive, but Dagmar's high spirits kept the party very successfully from being a quiet one.

The linotype machines, like models of prehistoric animals, were the most thrilling feature of the plant to Will, but Dagmar was unimpressed and slightly revolted by them. The men beside them were covered with a black grease and wore unbecoming black caps and aprons.

"It's dusty—" complained Dagmar. "Why not have a few of these, now, quite unattractive persons clad in green and yellow, hyacinth and amber? Even beige wouldn't be bad against these black machines

if you had a pale-blue-tile background. . . You know, have the floor a mosaic of pastel tiles. And then I suggest a row of shower-baths in some not too prominent place, so that the men can take a bath every fifteen minutes or oftener."

Will fell backward on his cane, laughing, the gaiety with which he was charged on this day pricked by Dagmar's nonsense. But the business manager, a straight, solemn man who looked as if he was balancing an inverted bowl on his head—that round, hard thing surely couldn't be a human skull—looked faintly uneasy, and led the way out and into the local room.

"This is what I want to be," said Dagmar, turning to the managing editor, who had been smiling politely at Dagmar's humorous effort. He now drew down his face and looked serious as Dagmar continued: "Couldn't you give me a job?"

"If you weren't so darned highbrow, now," he said.

"Good God," said Will. "If that's all that stands in the way, give her a job at once."

"Give me two jobs!" echoed Dagmar.

"Give her twenty jobs," said Will. "Here, Dagmar, sit down at the typewriter and write an interview with the great Mr. Geoffrey Dennis, managing editor of——"

"But I'm serious," said Dagmar.

It was not hard, once the managing editor understood that Will Freeman wanted her to have the job. She was given a place in the society room, and on the following morning she appeared, an hour later than the editor had suggested, to begin her duties.

A fat young man, licking an all-day sucker, came into the office where Dagmar sat looking somewhat uneasily at Miss Mary Moriarity, the society editor. "Haven't had breakfast yet," he grinned at Dagmar. "This is my breakfast." Dagmar shuddered in her fur coat, and turned her back. "My dear, who is that thoroughly objectionable person?" she asked Miss Moriarity, turning from her habitual slang, and careless mid-western accent into an unconscious imitation of Margaret, imitating an eastern American with social ambitions, imitating a European one. Miss Moriarity reddened and sat up very straight. "Sh—h—," she whispered. "That's the city editor."

Dagmar was disappointed, for she had thought that the city editor would be a super-Pal Bennett, who would bully her, but secretly love her madly. This man would not do at all for that romance. A creature who gnawed all-day suckers and needed attention from the barber. Fortunately there were

one or two young men about the office who looked, from a distance at least, presentable.

Dagmar did not suspect that she was to be more of a hindrance than a help to the society department. In fact, she thought that she would give it an invaluable air. She thought that her knowledge of society would be a distinct aid to Miss Moriarity, but that efficient young woman knew the social standing of every one in St. Paul much better than Dagmar did, though, personally, she knew very few of the people she wrote about.

John Patlock was hilarious over Dagmar's job. "That's pretty smart," he said again and again. "Imagine the pluck of the child wanting to go out and earn her own living! She doesn't inherit any of the Montgomery laziness."

Margaret was hysterical over it and objected in the best family tradition, and Aunt Etholla was bitterly sarcastic about it and said that any one could see with half an eye what her plans were, but she would never get Will Freeman, never in the world. Margaret suspected Dagmar of the same object, though Dagmar had four times the chance of meeting him socially that she had of meeting him in the newspaper-office, which he seldom came near. She therefore did not make her objections too strong, and, more than any one in the world, had hopes

that Willard Freeman would fall in love with Dagmar. She knew Dagmar and she knew Willard, and Willard had almost been in love with her once. Yes, she thought that Dagmar had a chance of becoming Mrs. Willard Freeman.

"Dagmar's such an industrious person"—she would fix her blue eyes on other women at teas, and continue dreamily: "I beg her to stay in bed sometimes in the morning, but she won't. Really, I'm worried about her. 'Darling, just rest this morning, and let me telephone the office!' But, no! not Dagmar. Such industry! Such determination!"

As a matter of fact, Dagmar had almost no industry, though she did have a greater degree of the mysterious quality called determination than any one else in the family. She was not a good reporter, not even a good society reporter, and her habit of early rising, deplored by Margaret, had never been noticed by any one in the office.

As the hour approached eleven every morning (eight o'clock was the time the other girls got down) Dagmar entered, clad in a working-girl's costume that was stagily tailored to a triumphant trimness and that shrieked: "Look! Look! I am a working-girl's costume!"

She lounged into the room occupied by the hard-worked society editor and her equally hard-worked

other assistant, and, after lighting a cigarette, put her feet up on the desk, not so much for comfort as because she thought it gave her a reportorial air, very chic because it had hitherto been used chiefly by men. She then proceeded with some difficulty, due to her position, to open her mail, ninety-five per cent of which was personal.

Miss Mary Moriarity, the society editor, was the daughter of a quiet and respectable tailor. She had worked her way up from file clerk to stenographer, from stenographer to secretary to the managing editor, and had then stepped into the society department, where she ruled with an efficiency seldom displayed by her particular profession. She disapproved of smoking and was fond of telling her six younger sisters, who were distributed in positions of varied and ever-increasing importance throughout the business and editorial staff of the paper, that the way to rise in the world was to come to work on time, tend strictly to business, discourage the attentions of men in the office during business hours, and preserve at all times a demeanor marked by the highest degree of decorum.

From the time that Dagmar entered at eleven, until one o'clock, when the pressing nature of her social activities generally took her away, the young men of the *Bee's* editorial staff found time, in spite

of the fact that these were the busiest two hours of the day, to come into the society room. At least six of them were unmistakably in love with her. Two office boys had been fired for typing her very ill-written scrawls; for Dagmar, at the time she took the position, was ignorant of the useful accomplishment of running a typewriter. Irate social climbers calling up the paper to put in the list of guests at their latest functions suffered all the tortures of bafflement and despair while Dagmar, on the telephone argued with some slender youth the question: Shall we motor into the country for tea or just run over to the University Club?

But it would be impossible to estimate the number of people who were upset and annoyed and ruined by Dagmar's determination to earn her own living. A friend of the owner is probably a deadly menace to any business, and Dagmar, being young, pretty, wholly incompetent, as well as possessed of an enormous estimate of her own intrinsic worth, was perhaps a little bit worse for the *St. Paul Daily Bee* than most friends of owners are.

By Christmas time, after a series of tactical skirmishes around Will Freeman worthy of a military genius and a greater cause, the managing editor of the paper finally boldly went to Will with the information that Dagmar was not suited to the work,

in his estimation. "Why not fire her?" asked Will. "Fire her!" The editor, on the point of uttering a number of incoherent, "I didn't know whether you—that is, being a friend of yours—" suddenly closed his mouth and said with the determination for which he was noted, "I will!"

He did. And on the day before Christmas the dismal news reached Dagmar, who took the opportunity to climb the long back-breaking hill home, on foot, dragging her feet through the snow and thinking sadly of what a failure she was. An innate sense of form made her unconsciously glad for the sake of contrast that it should have happened on Christmas Eve.

CHAPTER NINE

CHRISTMAS

Midnight, and the Christmas service was being read at St. Margaret's. Stately, solemn, with sonority and resonance, the Reverend Doctor Meadows was reading; and below, the indeterminate audience, mostly quivering in fashionable plumage, listened in respectable awe to words which held for many of them only a vague meaning.

In the back of the church, a little like a messenger from the three wise men, but more like a wandering and intoxicated college boy, a voice was heard to murmur and then rise until it rang through the church, more clearly than ever hotel page enunciated: "I'm looking for Dagmar Hallowell. Dagmar Hallowell! Dagmar Hallowell!"

The face of Palomon Bennett, impish, eery, like the face of Eros in the midst of his tricks, was caught by a gleam of light, and Dagmar with a gasp of admiration and pleasure, utterly incomprehensible to John Patlock and Etholla Montgomery, rose and walked as proudly out with him as if she had just been married. Before the eyes of the neck-twisting throng they made their escape. And it was not

until then that the pointers out of seats in their stiff costumes, unsuitable for running, began an imbecilic and short-lived pursuit.

"Where," asked Palomon Bennett in the jargon that was his natural method of conversing, "do we go from here? Is there some place that we can go and dance? I've never danced with you."

"I know a party I can take you to," said Dagmar. "Let's just go in and dance and pretend we don't know anybody and that we think it's a restaurant. . . ."

Pal agreed enthusiastically as any method of outraging social custom nearly always met with his approval. The party which was being held for the younger married set had reached the stage where the more serious-minded husbands were forcibly removing the slender fingers of their respective wives from around the hard smooth stems of half-filled glasses, and Esmeralda Forbes had mounted a chair in the middle of the floor where a form of dancing was going on, and was proclaiming: "I'm not very bright, but every one agrees that I'm most intriguing!"

Dagmar and Palomon swayed back and forth, in a superb disdain of the pitiful efforts of the guests at the party who were doing quaint, elderly dances, no doubt fashionable in their day. An intimacy based

on the very fragility of its actual incidents had sprung up between Dagmar and Palomon, which made them feel as they evaded one or two men who attempted to cut in that they understood all of each other's secret thoughts.

"This is impossible," said Pal, glaring with rage in his eyes at the bare shoulders of a stout matron of thirty who had unexpectedly deposited her bulk against him for an instant. "Let's go some place and talk."

They found a corner and subject for conversation without any difficulty. The corner was secluded; the subject was kissing. The conversation went on interminably. Hours passed. The guests went home, and they were put out by the hostess at a quarter of four on Christmas morning to continue it in their walk through the soft white streets. A sleepy cab on its way home from a party was imprudently hailed by Pal, but here the argument did not reach its proper consummation; because Dagmar, for reasons as unknown to herself as they were incomprehensible to Pal, decidedly refused to be kissed.

Dagmar had fallen into her first sleep when she was aroused by the sound of hysterical weeping. Margaret had just come into the room holding a Christmas telegram from Herbie. In spite of the mildly erudite gentleman who was being paid to

assist Herbie with his studies in his eleventh Eastern preparatory school, the young man had once more been released. This time on his own initiative. Wandering past the symbolic picture of his country in the form of a tall gentleman in a Fourth-of-July costume, who pointed his finger at Herbie, who was now grown to be six foot four and much more gangling than his father had ever been, Herbie had been fired with an ambition to join the marines and see the world. He had immediately, being nearly twenty and in perfect health, been accepted for service. And as it was Christmas Day and he was leaving for Haiti, he had remembered to telegraph his mother the news, together with a suitable greeting in which he had not forgotten either Dagmar or his aunt Etholla.

The morning was spent in frantic pleadings from Margaret Patlock to her husband to get her darling boy home again, to which John Patlock replied with a gloomy silence interrupted by "Suffering Beeswax!" and "Great Cat!" The long monotonous groans of Etholla echoed through the corridors, and Dagmar impatiently arose, ate her breakfast in her room, and settled down on the window-seat to think over the events of the night before.

It was all a maze since her unexpected rising in the church and going out. It's queer, she thought,

among other platitudes that she uttered in her self-discoveries that he should be so much more important to me than any one else I have ever met. Clouds of fluffy white vapor seemed to be rising from the snow that had fallen the night before down in the depths of the valley, making of it a bed as soft and downy as a cloud and shutting out the squalor below as if their chiffon entablature was supported by fairy arches and concealed down there a magic and beautiful city.

She remembered suddenly that Prince Vladimer had lived down in the valley and gallantly climbed the wall to see her each night. True, there had not been a wall, any more than there had been a Prince, "and in those days I was ignorant of the fact that Princes do not live in Mississippi flats." And then she thought that Palomon Bennett was not even symbolical of such a Vladimer as her mother would wish for her. He hadn't enough money, and his family, said those who were able to detect these delicate distinctions in St. Paul society, was a trifle on the nouveau-riche side—that branch of it which had enough money to be anything at all. "No, he's too much of a dweller in the flats to please my mother," thought Dagmar, "but, then, I have never especially tried to please my mother in my life," she added philosophically.

That afternoon, wearing that flush which is aroused in youth by staying up all night and being afterward unable to sleep from excitement, Pal called at Dagmar's home to find the house full of other people who had dropped in for no reason that he could see except to congratulate each other on the fact that it was Christmas. Will Freeman and two other boys who were home from college for the holidays took up Dagmar's attention to such an extent that, in spite of his natural ingeniousness, he was unable to murmur even one tender word in her ear. He did, however, manage to fix her eyes in a long affectionate look which he hoped was passionate and soulful, as she handed him a cup of tea. "What's that for?" she asked. "To be filed as a cross-reference to our discussion last night," he told her. Convinced that he had done all he could, he soon afterward took his leave.

Their acquaintance, he felt, justified him in making, that evening, a very tense thing of their farewell. He had come with his mother to his grandmother's for Christmas, but was leaving late that night for Chicago. When he found that Dagmar expected to attend a party in company with Will Freeman, he saw that there was only one thing to do, and that was to insist on taking her away from the house so the fellow couldn't find her. They went

to a club and talked about the extreme aristocracy of Dagmar and Pal, and the extreme ignobleness of the rest of the diners. The Hois and the Pollois aroused Pal's disgust even while he pitied them, and he favored making all Hois wear a uniform so that they wouldn't offend the sight with the bad taste of their costumes. Dagmar then proclaimed herself a Hoi, but Pal said this was impossible because she was with him and he was emphatically not a Polloi. "The Prince may stoop to a peasant," said Dagmar. "In which case the Prince always kisses the peasant very soundly," responded Pal, and the discussion was on again. But Dagmar persisted in her curious refusal, and a very sulky and disgruntled Pal climbed on the ten-o'clock train for Chicago, while Dagmar, who had telephoned Willard Freeman, went on to a party, wondering why she hadn't kissed the handsome boy and with a little pang in her heart, because it was so very uncertain when she would see him again.

CHAPTER TEN

ONWARD AND UPWARD AND ONWARD . . .

Dagmar, half dozing, sat uncomfortably in a stiff straight chair. She was a guest at one of the more virulent forms of afternoon tea. A woman lecturer, fat hands clasped on a little platform made of her chubby stomach, beamed and swayed with cheerful respectability while she told of the splendid work of an organization in Chicago of which she was the invaluable head.

It was early in January, and to Dagmar the future looked as bleak as the day, which was an extremely dismal one. Twenty-one years old, thought Dagmar, and I've never done a single thing in my whole life. I will not marry—as she thought of Will Freeman—unless something wonderful and romantic should happen, she finished, thinking of Palomon Bennett. She was more dissatisfied than she had ever been in her life. The exciting novelty of holding a job was gone. Exhausting as she had found her duties and lacking in excitement, there had still been a stimulus in making a daily appearance and the sight of a nebulous goal. The thing to do, she thought, is to go to New York, or some other large

city. She could study music and become a concert pianist. It might be fun to be an artist and wear a smock. New York was the place. New York or Chicago. Chicago and Palomon Bennett were so entangled in Dagmar's mind that with an unusual and uncharacteristic attack of maidenliness she hastily decided on New York.

The lecturer went on and on. Dagmar was tortured because she had to keep awake. Most of her audience were listening to her words with eager attention. And she, with perfect aplomb and immense self-assurance, was telling them all about herself.

The audience, she had said as she came forward to greet them, reminded her of a little story. She told the story. The audience was amused. It rippled out polite little gurgles of pleased sound. The story, Mrs. Jones said (she was the well-known Mrs. Nella Jones of Chicago), reminded her of something she always said. She told what she always said, and, leaning forward from the waist, became unexpectedly earnest. The women's faces instantly reflected a visible improvement, both moral and mental.

Mrs. Jones had come to St. Paul at the request of several public-spirited women who wanted to hear all about her work in "The Chicago School Lover's League." She was making the schools into com-

munity centres organizing the parents and teachers, and had an auxiliary to aid boys and girls to get part-time employment. Thus she enabled those who otherwise would have had to stop school at fourteen to get at least two years of high school. Her motto was: "Reach the child and you reach the world." She hoped to be able to change the entire city of Chicago in twenty years by getting in touch with—here she always smiled benevolently, the mother smile—"the young people."

By the time Mrs. Jones had arrived at "Reach the child and you reach the world," she might have been said to have been fully launched. A number of quotations, more or less apt, from Robert W. Service and Alfred Tennyson, were incorporated; a beautiful little poem by Edgar A. Guest, about the value of a child's thoughts, was recited; a few humorous anecdotes from Mrs. Jones's personal experience, a reference to her own beloved boy made up the lighter side of her speech. But this was not all. The practical side of her work was fully revealed. She had offices, she said. The women nodded. They would have offices, too, if they took up the work. And she had a corps of bright, sweet, wholesome, interested young girls working for her. "It would do your heart good to see them," said Mrs. Jones. They were investigators and organizers. They went

into the school districts and organized clubs through the schools. The children adored them. They organized girl scout's clubs, dancing classes, dramatic clubs (one of them was a talented actress who had given many public readings). In short, these girls did whatever they could to bring the children together in wholesome fun that would keep them off the streets and away from the dance-halls. (Here Mrs. Jones pursed her lips, refolded her hands, and shook a frowning, knowing-looking head at her audience, many of whom also sighed knowingly.) Dance-halls, they all seemed to breathe despairingly.

Dagmar had dozed and she woke with a start at the sound of "Roger's Park" on the speaker's lips. Instantly Dagmar was wide awake. Pal lived in Roger's Park. Mrs. Jones was relating the experiences of one of her splendid young assistants in the Roger's Park school. This girl had been very successful with a new idea which was to organize eighth-grade alumnæ associations, thus binding together children who would otherwise drift apart. The organization had received funds to carry this work into all the schools, and she was returning to Chicago to begin the matter on a wider scale, taking on more girls, keeping, as she said, "more closely to the grindstone than ever." She smiled bravely.

The opportunity and the inspiration came to

Dagmar simultaneously. Why couldn't she be one of those new girls? Chicago? There at least, in a new place, a big place, something worth while might happen. She, too, might reach the children and change the world in twenty years. Her heart raced violently, and she saw herself in a nurse's uniform putting away with dignity a huge gold crown. The picture was vague and fleeting, but it implied that from now on Dagmar Hallowell would put away the tawdry magnificence of a spectacular career in favor of the more wonderful one of service to humanity.

She approached Mrs. Jones while the tea-drinking was going on and the women were retelling to each other their fragmentary impressions of the lecture. "I've been so interested in your talk, Mrs. Jones," said Dagmar. Mrs. Jones said afterward that she was instantly delighted with Dagmar's fresh youth. Her capacity for the enjoyment of fresh youth was that day, as always, unlimited. Dagmar invited her to dine with her before catching her train back to Chicago, and she was delighted again.

By telephoning, Dagmar was able to get the Patlock limousine. Mrs. Jones stepped in, her fat self-assurance suffering a not quite visible shock at the sight of car and chauffeur. Her facile mind took a tremendous leap, and she pictured Dagmar as an American Princess. But Dagmar herself, aside from

any background, would have impressed Mrs. Jones as being the daughter of millions, for she had inherited the invisible shrug of Charles Montgomery, an intangible air which had its effect, even on Mrs. Jones.

They dined at a respectable club. Mrs. Jones talked. Dagmar plied her with food and listened. Finally, with the girlish wholesomeness that was the key-note of her characterization that night, Dagmar asked if she couldn't come to Chicago and be one of the girls who were going to help in organizing the eighth-grade alumnæ associations. "You see," said Dagmar seriously. "I feel that I could help so much in my own city if I had had the opportunity of working first under you."

This went, as Mrs. Jones said, straight to her heart. Civic love, it was; the desire to be of service. These were the things that counted. And while, of course, it was customary to take girls who were college graduates and had had some training in social service, the thing that really mattered, as Mrs. Jones said she always said, was the personality of the girl.

Dagmar agreed to report to her in Chicago on the following Monday morning.

One of those absurd opportunities for melodrama that chance sometimes offers occurred to Dagmar

when she came to tell her family about her contemplated departure.

As an aftermath of a public appearance the day before, Etholla had developed an acute attack of her current disease and had insisted upon having the doctor called in the middle of the night. This annoyed not only the doctor, who had recently taken her case, but also John Patlock, who made himself disagreeable and insisted upon every member of the household getting down to breakfast.

There was some confusion in consequence. Margaret went through a caricature of her usual morning activities, sputtering, "perfectly ridiculous, perfectly ridiculous," and sat with enormous dignity at the head of the table.

"There's too darn much laziness in this family, anyway," John grumbled. Margaret raised her eyebrows slightly, and it irritated him still more because he knew that it meant that she considered him ill bred. He continued in the spirit of harmless nagging with which so many husbands decorate a morning meal: "Whole family is lazy, and you know it. Have to watch for it in Dagmar. Your father was a very charming old gentleman, but you know as well as I do that he never did a stroke of work in his life. Etholla is everlastingly in bed for just one reason. She's too darned lazy to get up. And what with

Herbie being fired from a dozen schools for nothing but refusing to get up in the mornings——"

This was Dagmar's opportunity. She rose to leave the table, gently glad of the theatrical possibilities that might develop. "I cannot listen to any more," she said. "You can say all you please about my aunt Etholla, and my mother is your wife, so I suppose it gives you some rights over her, but when you come to making remarks about my brother Herbert, I leave this roof! I'm taking the train to-night for Chicago!"

John Patlock's jaw dropped open. He was very fond of Dagmar and did not blame her for her disappointment because Herbert was not learning to despise the middle west at an Eastern university instead of enjoying the climate of Haiti as an enlisted man in the Marine Corps. It was certainly not his fault that Herbert had enlisted, and the reference to Chicago confused him completely.

Dagmar, still preserving her grand manner, disclosed her plan for supporting herself in the future. John Patlock, to her surprise, approved the idea. "Look here, Dagmar, if you want to go to Chicago and work, I'm for you. I'd like to see you amount to something, because I think you've got it in you, and this damned society business is no kind of life for a girl." Here Margaret shuddered. "You can

always call on"—he hesitated and wished he had the courage to say, your daddy—"me for money. You know that this is your home and always will be as long as you want it." Facile tears stood in his kind eyes, and he took a hasty swallow of coffee and left the room abruptly, dropping his napkin on the floor as he went.

"Daddy," called Dagmar, "you're one peach and I didn't mean it about Herbie. You've always been wonderful to both of us." It came to his ears through a monotony of "perfectly ridiculous, perfectly ridiculous," from his wife.

It was settled then, for Margaret had the feeblest authority over Dagmar, and that night (it was Saturday) found Dagmar incredibly ensconced in a Pullman. "A working girl can't afford luxuries," she told the protesting Will Freeman, who was telling Margaret somewhat bitterly that he thought Dagmar, if she must run about the country alone, might at least have been put in a compartment.

"If you don't get off the train you'll compromise me," said Dagmar when she had kissed the appropriately tearful Margaret good-by. She looked into his eyes, which were clouded with a vague pain. "I'm sure it's going to start right away."

"Dagmar, don't go," he said incoherently. "Stay here—" and added almost shyly "with me." Then

as if realizing the absurdity of his words, he shot the floor with his stick, exploded a "Well!" and put out his hand for "Good-by," leaving Dagmar wondering.

BOOK TWO

THE CONTINUOUS LULL

CHAPTER ONE

BOARDING-HOUSE

The luncheon was unlike any that Dagmar had ever attended. A dining-room of the type used by suburbanites without too much money, enlarged and glorified, was attached to the larger public dining-room of one of the Chicago department stores. Here sat about twenty earnest women addressing each other with polite respect and heavily weighing each other's opinions. None of the frivolous chatter, the dangling of bags, the powdering of noses that Dagmar associated with a luncheon. These women were in earnest about things. Not in earnest about just one thing, but in earnest about everything. They hoped to abolish a spectacular bogey idiomatically referred to as the crime wave; they believed that they would be able to bring about a complete state of prohibition; they thought, even before they heard her talk, that Mrs. Jones was doing a splendid work.

The youngest woman present would not be bad-looking if she would use a lip-stick, Dagmar thought. She looked a bit anæmic somehow, but a bit of rouge would fix that in a minute. She was the type of young woman who is known as "wholesome,"

however, having gone in for athletics heavily in school. Her ambition was to make her husband rise at two o'clock every Sunday morning and wait in line at the public golf-links in order to be able to begin to play at six.

She interested Dagmar because she was the only person there who came even faintly within any orbit Dagmar had ever touched. The rest were middle-aged middle-class women, whose aims were so different from those of Dagmar as to be almost inconceivable to her. Her heart sank as she looked across at the smiling face of her protector, Mrs. Jones, fairly bursting with good-will. On her cheeks tiny veins, that looked as if they had been scrawled in red ink, were deepening as she heartily ate, drank, talked, and beamed. She is my only friend, thought Dagmar sadly, in all the city. The day before a cool feminine voice had informed her over the telephone that Palomon Bennett was out of town. The voice was not at all interested to learn that Miss Dagmar Hallowell of St. Paul was in the city, though it admitted belonging to Palomon's mother. Dagmar hung up the phone with the baffled impression that for some reason Mrs. Bennett disapproved of her. As a matter of fact, the older woman feared and dreaded the time when she should lose her only son to such an extent that she discouraged all young

women whenever the opportunity came. Though she knew very well who Dagmar was, having passed her own girlhood in St. Paul, she did not feel it necessary to extend any hospitality to Dagmar, as the families had never been at all intimate.

The food is terrible here, Dagmar thought, and smiled as she thought of the horror that Margaret would feel if she could have seen her daughter in such a place. And they'd be just as thunderstruck if they saw Margaret smoking through her meal, she thought, and glowed with self-appreciation to think that she, Dagmar, was broad-minded enough to understand both points of view.

The emotion was momentary and unrecognized as such, for the women had become extremely warm over the question of whether their next meeting should be held in the Woman's Pantry Club or a place called the Illinois Grill. When the Woman's Pantry Club had carried the day, the young woman whose lips Dagmar had wanted to rouge arose and introduced the first speaker, who was president of a league to enforce prohibition.

"Oh, God," thought Dagmar dismally, resorting in her despair to the language of the movies. The skin of the woman's neck hung down in leathery yellow folds, and though her hat was much too far on the back of her head, she looked around with

great self-possession and included the company in what Dagmar in a letter to Will Freeman called "a ghastly smile."

"What am I going to do?" thought Dagmar. "Is this what I have come to Chicago for? Am I to be thrown with an endless horde of such unbelievable atrocities as these people? No, no, I came to work, to really work for the first time in my life, and such affairs as these will have little to do with my job."

Mrs. Jones in the goodness of her heart and the natural desire to let such an appreciative listener as Dagmar hear her speech again had invited Dagmar to be her companion at the luncheon. Glad to be released of her duty, which that morning had consisted of staring at a large map of the city of Chicago hung on the wall, Dagmar had accepted.

The air in the room where the map hung had been very bad. Dagmar was to learn the names of the streets, the divisions of the city that the School Lover's League had made, the names of all the grammar-schools, and also of a dozen welfare organizations already functioning in the city. Each one had been represented on the map by a large pin with a colored head. She had grown very sleepy staring at the map.

Dagmar felt the eye of the speaker rest on her with

a sort of didactic severity. Lovely woman, she was saying, was neglecting her time-honored profession of being an "influence." The mere fact that women are men's political equals was no reason why they should give up the faculty of charm, she said. The pupils of her eyes, Dagmar noted, were so faded and the whites so discolored that it was difficult to tell where one began and the other left off. Indeed, went on the speaker, this was the very thing that the opposers of suffrage had feared. But—and here the speaker shook her forefinger and smiled until her heavy skin was crumpled and lined with ruts like carriage-tracks on a muddy road—the women would show them!

Small soft laughs and a sympathetic smile of interchange between the members of her small audience encouraged her. She went on to say that it was her own idea, that if the women of the city, the club-women, the mothers—in fact, women of the better type—would attend all court sessions, their mere presence would lend an incalculable influence for good. Criminals would then see how the women feel about their deeds, and who knows how many a young boy, seeing a tender woman's face in court that might have been his mother's, would turn away from the path he was treading and go once more along the pathway of truth.

The serious note. The luncheon looked at one another with tightened lips, nodding.

Who knew, asked the speaker, what tremendous potentialities for good this thought might contain. This idea, once started by the club-women of Chicago (and she was trying to reach all the clubs), might spread all over the world. "Now, it is a fact," she said, and paused the better to emphasize the surprise she was about to give them, "that the Eighteenth Amendment is treated with levity in some homes; in some families, and I do not exaggerate, my friends, when I say that even some of these families contain young boys and girls, there are stills operating. Yes, stills operating! Now the moment you begin to make light of one law the others are all inevitably doomed. Is it any wonder that crime stalks rampant through the city? I tell you that this crime wave is not due at all to men out of jobs on the point of starvation, for I believe that there is some propaganda to that effect, but solely to the fact that the better class of people, and especially the better class of women, have allowed the Eighteenth Amendment to be made light of.

"And let me say again that you can't make light of one law unless you want all laws to be abandoned."

Dagmar had a vague passing thrill as she listened,

for the idea that these somewhat ugly women, most of whom were devoid of natural teeth, would be scarcely more thrilling to young criminals, even though motherless, than they were to her, did not trouble her. She thought, as a matter of fact, nothing at all, but merely caught the contagion that went around the table as these women for an instant visualized themselves as the saviors of society. Perhaps some intangible reminiscence of Florence Nightingale in the back of the collective mind of all of them agitated the air. They all sat up and began to babble ". . . honest lives . . . they don't get a chance . . . just like your own boy, my, my!" And a delicious shiver went through those mothers who could visualize their own offspring in the dock. They shook their heads and signed a resolution eagerly. Dagmar signed and was visited for an instant with a dream of Pal being tried for something blood-curdling while she, appropriately clad, smiled at him and made him realize how wonderful she was. A vision somewhat beside the point, but equally as satisfactory to Dagmar as if it had been an acute and pointed commentary.

She applauded politely and listened with an interested air to Mrs. Jones without actually hearing anything she said. This gift was to prove convenient to Dagmar in her intercourse with her em-

ployer, for she went to many luncheons and a number of dinners, and also heard very often the same rather limited vocabulary, repeating the same respectable ideas to the staff of girls—and not a few times did she ride along on the elevated railroad while the slow metronymic beat of them lost nothing because they were oracularly delivered to an audience of one.

And so Dagmar became very popular with Mrs. Nella Jones.

When the luncheon was finished, and an amazing amount of personal compliments had been exchanged, Dagmar found herself alone with Mrs. Jones, who, in her extreme anxiety about Dagmar's happiness and her fear of Dagmar's loneliness, suggested that she go over to the Blackstone Hotel, where she had imprudently registered, and take her baggage to a boarding-house which Mrs. Jones had thoughtfully selected. "I know you are worn out and tired with the excitement of your first day, and anxious to get settled, so you had better stop work for the day and go to this boarding place, which I am sure you will find wonderfully pleasant."

Leaning back wearily in the taxicab which she took from the Blackstone to the boarding-house, the events since her arrival whirled around and around, presenting themselves with an annoying persistence

that would not let her think the tranquil and quieting thoughts she wanted to think. The small room at the Blackstone which had soothed her on her arrival with its comfortable promise of a bath, breakfast in bed, and a telephone close at hand to put her in close connection with Pal. And the voice of Mrs. Bennett would come to her again, "Palomon Bennett is not in the city at present." Then the lonely hours of Sunday; her miserable luncheon by herself in the strange hotel; the solitary walk down the avenue blown like a piece of waste paper by the cold lake breeze and unheeded as a stray dog by the people hurrying past with their coat collars round their ears: each picture presented itself and she smiled a little wanly as she remembered that she had gone to the movies and cried through a number of scenes that under normal circumstances would have roused a disdainful amusement. Her nerves were in much the same condition now after the excitement of her day, but that morning she had risen enthusiastically to meet her first day at the School Lover's League. The marble-floored lobby, with its peanut and cigar stand, its telephone-booth, and amateur looking lunch-counter presented itself to her mind's eye again and again. She had sailed through it magnificently, head up, and flirted into the elevator with a movement that she thought very

businesslike. The dizzy sensation of the elevator came to her again, for at the back of the shaft large windows gave her the faintly terrifying vista of the city receding as the car travelled up to the nineteenth story.

If only these pictures would stop coming. If she could think of something pleasant, like Pal, perhaps she would feel better. Where was Pal, anyway? She straightened up and opened her eyes, for they had filled with tears.

The district through which they were passing reminded her of the costumes of the women with whom she had lunched; the colors of the houses, which even in their pristine state could never have been pleasing to the eye, were now so battered by dust and years that they seemed to exist for no reason except that they had determined to do so. And nothing could be done about it. White paint wouldn't help the houses any more than rouge would help the women. They were all unbeautiful through and through, to her superficial and youthful eyes. And to her horror, the cab had jolted to a stop before one of the most unpleasant of them all.

The undertakerial exterior of the boarding-house looked dusty and lugubrious, for a thaw had melted part of the snow, leaving the remainder gray and crumpled-looking like soiled laundry thrown about.

The gray and dismal tan of the grass plot which fronted it was ugly in the afternoon sunlight and defiant of the soft exhilarating air, almost spring-like, which the Chicago climate has no scruples in sending as either a postlude or prelude to an all-encompassing blizzard.

The interior was equally funereal. Gray-green going toward brown was the dominating note epitomized in a carving, in rich golden oak, of the late Theodore Roosevelt in profile.

'Mrs. Jones spoke to me about you," said the woman who came to meet Dagmar. She was cushioned even more completely than Mrs. Jones herself, shielded by mounds of flesh at every conceivable point and equally as motherly.

If the house was colorless, Dagmar found that her own room made up for it. The kalsomined walls made her gape as she opened the door, for the room was a dazzling effulgence of blue.

At dinner Dagmar met the eleven other young women who dwelt there. As Mrs. Jones had prophesied, they were to the last girl utterly interested in everything—especially if they thought it would improve them. Dagmar, who thought that nothing would improve them, was soon avoided by all of them as an insufferable and slightly peculiar snob. But that first night she talked of choral societies, of

the more pallid athletics, of the college girl's responsibility as a moral uplifter and the effect on the female constitution of cigarette smoking.

Existence here would be impossible, she decided; and very far from anything she had rosily imagined. It might have been more bearable if she had been able to spin the merry stuff of farce from her raw material, as she certainly would have done, if it had not been so appallingly serious. Her employer expected her to live there! And she had not the slightest idea how to find another place unless she went to a hotel.

She went to bed forlornly, almost ready to give up and go back to St. Paul. But the morning brought her a renewed sense of adventure only slightly dampened by finding that there was no hot water for a bath. She swung out of the house hopefully and joined the morning crowds on the street-cars for work.

As she looked at the girls in their early-morning costumes, sleepy, disgruntled, too evidently disturbed because they could not find seats, she thought of Pal and his theory that working girls should all wear costumes. She could glimpse a girl who wore a pair of archaic high-heeled, laced white-kid shoes, a black-lace hat, and a flimsy blue and slinky dress of indeterminate material. The girl had one of those countenances that appear in some curious way to

be both weak and hard, perhaps because they wear no particular expression, but are lined with an unpleasing grimness. The frizz of blonde artificially curled hair, inevitable accompaniment of such faces, of such costumes, was there, and it suddenly occurred to Dagmar, who had been pitying the girl with utter detachment that she looked not unlike Margaret's intimate, Adele Fremeer. She giggled. "I bet Adele used to look like that at afternoon functions ten years ago." For she had estimated that the costume was approximately that many years out of date.

At the office she found a letter from Margaret enclosing a letter from Pal, which was hastily written from New York. He had been sent down there by his firm, it seemed, and might stay there indefinitely. It contained an ambiguous hint that he hoped Dagmar would not mind living in New York and was signed with love.

She was more sentimental than she had ever been in her life as she shut herself up with the map that morning. She focussed her attention on an orange-colored pin and then on a black one, but the effect was undoubtedly soporific. She had had plenty of sleep the night before, but she longed to stretch out on a couch with Pal's letter under her pillow and think about him for a long while.

CHAPTER TWO

HUNEKER OF THE GRAMMAR-SCHOOL

"Don't overwork yourself, my flower," said the blithsome Mrs. Jones, "remember that even the sun needs rest."

Dagmar drooped in her hard, stiff, official chair. Dagmar Hallowell, the school organizer, looking delicately wilted (an appearance she always achieved when she was bored), was dictating her first weekly report to the stenographer:

"Monday I spent in learning the map of Chicago. I attended a luncheon given by the Women's Chicago Improvement Association. Tuesday——"

"Would you want to mention that you heard a number of interesting talks," suggested the demure and exquisitely dressed stenographer who unostentatiously corrected Dagmar's report and admired her enormously.

"I suppose I ought to?" said Dagmar inquiringly. " . . . In the afternoon I went out to the stockyards and talked to Miss Helen Scott, a former social worker in the district." Dagmar sighed. Her tremendous industry was beginning to pall as a diversion, and she wished that she knew of some attrac-

tive person to lunch with. Not one even faintly amusing person had she met since her advent, and she thought sceptically of the girls who visited in Chicago and reported "wonderful times." There were several friends of the family in the city, but none of the ones who had visited in St. Paul had roused any particular interest in Dagmar.

The large competent workers, whom Mrs. Jones introduced as her other chicks, smiled at Dagmar in a friendly way, but appeared to be too busy to seek her acquaintance. The girls at the boarding-house showed a similar busyness, garnished with a little hostility. For the first time in her life she was completely lonely. Her evenings that week had been spent in suffering one or two minor rebuffs from the badly dressed girls in the boarding-house and in writing long letters to all her friends.

"On Wednesday morning I began making the rounds of the schools," went on Dagmar drearily, and in struggling to find a verb to fit in the next long meandering sentence, she discovered that she had a headache, a backache, and a faint nausea. "I think I'll stop for to-day," she said faintly. And Mrs. Jones's hearty, "Poor child you've been doing too much," shamed and reassured her at once, and she put on her hat and left the building.

The office of the School Lover's League closed at

noon on Saturday, and Dagmar realized that she faced the prospect of a lonely afternoon and a still more lonely Sunday. She tramped the streets and spent a fairly cheerful hour trying on gowns she had no intention of buying, but it was lonesome work, and when finally she telephoned the residence of a friend of Margaret's and found that the family had gone to Florida, she wept and went wearily home to fling herself across her narrow hard bed and fall hopelessly asleep.

Her second week at work found her making a regular appearance at the office at noon. The presumption of Mrs. Jones that her mornings were spent in interviewing school principals was incorrect. She was in bed. In the third week, though she guiltily thought it scandalous if she slept until ten, her inner consciousness whispered that it would be futile for her to try to get up in the morning. Once or twice, with magnificent bravery, she did get up at nine, but more often she turned over for another hour. She had found that the possibilities of a hot-water bath were greater at ten than they were at eight. And her weekly report showed an amazing number of school principals to have been out when Dagmar called to talk to them about the School Lover's League.

She stayed on at the boarding-house through in-

ertia. Though she still despised the clothes and ideas of the girls where she lived, she had a secret wistful longing to have them admire her. A newcomer, a little fragile and too-frank girl named Mary Louise Kent, sought her out the night she arrived and confided excitedly that she was going to the theatre with a very rich man who called for her in a taxicab, and took her to supper afterward. Dagmar exerted all her charm and helped Mary Louise dress, thinking afterward all evening that she would be a friend to Mary Louise and even possibly tell her something about Pal (for her necessity to talk about him was very great). But the next day, Mary Louise appeared under the protection of one of the other girls, avoided Dagmar, and even that slender companionship was denied her. Again Dagmar cried herself to sleep, wondering why the girls did not like her.

Something of what she was feeling, the isolation, the strangeness, crept into her letters to Pal, and even to Will Freeman. Both answered her with increasing tenderness, and so, presently as she moved through her lazy days she lived in a continuous lull, hushed of unpleasantness with dreams. Her friends at home were dearly defined by their remembered virtues, and she thought of Pal in New York with all the accredited wistfulness of a soldier thinking of

burning home fires, God's country, or the loved ones beyond the seas.

But a hum of amazing activity was always going to come on the next day, Dagmar thought. Each night she believed she would wake in the morning, vigorously perform a week's work in three or four hours, and either find that Pal had unexpectedly arrived from New York, or else meet a number of interesting individuals who would fill up her days. This optimism kept her from going home. And whenever she thought of returning, the acid remarks of those persons who had criticised her for leaving sounded in her ears. "Not back to St. Paul," she would say to herself, for it seemed to her that St. Paul was mysteriously different from all other cities—more stupid, more given to interesting itself in its neighbor's business, more willing to poke its finger into her pie than Toledo or Buffalo would have been; a curious delusion that many people have about their own city, even as they feel (and often at the same time) that it is in some way better and finer and more "homelike" than other cities. So Dagmar said, "Not back to St. Paul," as if she could have gone back if it had been any other town.

Dagmar found an advertisement of a St. Paul firm that had slipped down in one of the pockets of her

travelling bag. It was headed: "What I must do to-day!" and under it was written in smaller letters: "A ship without a chart gets lost in the ocean." Underneath were lines drawn in ink in which might be written a complete schedule of any one's intended activities for one day. This seemed to be what Dagmar had been looking for all her life. She immediately sat down and wrote out a schedule for the following day, which after a few erasures was satisfactory.

A. M.
7 Rise, bathe, dress, mending.
8 Breakfast.
8:30 to 12:30 Visit schools.
12:30 Luncheon.
P. M.
1 to 3 Visit schools.
3 to 4 Office work.
5 Walk home.
6 Dine.
7 to 11 Recreation.
11 Bed.

She went to bed eager for the new day to begin that she might try her schedule. She awakened the next morning at a quarter of eight, sleepily remembered her schedule, thought dismally that she would

be unable to mend a slight hole in her only clean pair of stockings because the time for "mending" had gone by. "Why didn't I do it last night?" she thought with some dismay but remembered that the evening hours were spent in "recreation." She lay wondering what she would do about her schedule and letting some of the tired wrinkles come slowly out of her body as if the bed had been a big soothing iron and she a piece at the laundry. She looked at the clock and saw that it was eight-thirty. "That's impossible," she said; "only a few moments ago it was a quarter of eight." She sighed, and turned over, "my schedule is shot," she thought with regret. "And it was such a sensible schedule with everything in it just right." Her eyes closed and she lay motionless until nine-thirty, when she began to be a little tired of lying in bed, and quite cheerful at the prospect of getting up. Her bath took place at ten o'clock, and she thought that it was much better to have a hot bath than it would have been to have plunged into cold water, for it was a chilly, disagreeable day and she could hear the Chicago wind howling about the house as ardently as if it had been a wolf wailing at the door of an arctic trading-post. "A cold bath on most mornings," she told herself, "would be the best thing in the world for me." It seemed somehow more heroic and businesslike. It

might be an interesting note to add: Dagmar never took a cold bath during all the months of her stay in Chicago.

The boarding-house breakfast was served between eight and nine. Dagmar's schedule planned to have her down at the dining-room door just as it opened. Dagmar never saw that door open. And few were the mornings when she breakfasted in there at all. As on this morning, she came down too late and went out to a tea shop for breakfast.

After breakfast she boarded the elevated railway almost empty at this time of the morning, for the day's crowds had long since gone into the city, and dreamed her way through the city, carried by an obscure sense of rhythm, vaguely charmed by the changing pictures beneath her. At these moments she would reach a secure and definite kind of happiness which was unconscious, because the moment she thought enough about herself to realize her actual situation she was troubled and disturbed.

Beneath her a tenement back-yard would give place to a gray and filthy acreage of tin cans, but, chin propped on hand in utter bodily comfort and swayed by a motion as soothing as the rocking of a cradle, she would think of incidents, real and imaginary, so amusing as to cause her to smile, or so sentimental as to bring small, brightening tears to her

eyes. Very often she pretended that Pal was her companion, and the astonished and belated passengers would be edified with the sight of a very pretty girl, slouched down in her seat, with her lips moving, her eyes smiling while she gazed unseeingly out of the window.

Warm and comfortable and happy, she always got off the elevated railway reluctantly, and on this morning the air which swept her from the station platform was raw and shocking to her pampered nerves. She felt a sensation of dizziness as she stepped from the car to the platform, a sinking of the heart, and a swift dream of falling which bewildered her and made her reach for a rail to which she could cling. She descended fearfully, for she could never overcome the feeling that she might be swept to the ground at any moment.

And now began her search through the stock-yards district for the unfamiliar streets. On all sides were low squalid houses with here and there an enormous institution, either public or commercial. Over everything was the sickening, powerful smell of the yards. Foreigners gaped at her stupidly, and when she stopped to ask directions of one of them, he shook his head at her wonderingly and answered in an unfamiliar tongue. She boarded the wrong street-car, a not unusual proceeding with her, and travelled

dreary blocks before she found it out. She was forced to get out on a windy corner and walk back two blocks against a staggering wind, thinking, as she walked that the School Lover's League ought to furnish cabs, that Chicago conducters should all be discharged for incompetence, that some one ought to invent something to bridle the wind; as always, quite unable to realize that there are some disagreeable things in life that even the young members of the human race have never been able to eradicate.

But suddenly, as if she had been guided there by a kind guardian spirit, she saw a huge ugly grammar-school looming before her. "Prizman School," she read, and knew that though this was not the school she had been searching for, it was one of the institutions on her list.

She came in out of the cold with a feeling of having seen a miracle performed, for this building had appeared almost in answer to a prayer. "I couldn't have walked another step," said Dagmar, and drew a long, sickening breath of the overheated and chemically purified air. Through the building went the low, purring hum of machinery, and she saw before her an ugly green-painted hallway and a flight of sand-colored stairs, muddy with that special look of recently scrubbed stairs soiled by a hundred small feet.

She was tired after her battle with the wind and inexpressibly bored at the thought of walking into the nun-like sanctuary of the school principal, where awed and aging women, made anæmic by a hundred bloodless encounters with their superiors, in which they were always beaten, glided in and out with the hush of rubber heels and a cowed respect for the established order.

She had made up her mind that this was the type of school she was entering on account of a few generalizations she had made to the delight of Mrs. Jones, based on the schools she had already visited. The schools in which she found wide light stairways, concrete floors, and open spaces containing flower-decorated tables, were the schools, said Dagmar in her report, in which she found the most intelligent principals; *i. e.*, the ones most open to the advances of the School Lover's League. Schools of the type she was entering now were apt to be run by old maids with complexes, thought Dagmar shaking her youthful head with the wisdom of one who is securely above such things.

She sighed and mounted a few steps to look out of a window like a child loitering on the way to an unpleasant duty. She sauntered on and examined an exhibit of still-life drawings in crayon. She yawned with a soft, ill-bred little sound and turned

into an unattractive room marked "office." It was empty, and so she sat down on a hard shining bench evidently designed to remind culprits of the discomforts of sin. The bare, grayish boards of the floor glared at her accusingly, as did the notice peppered walls, kalsomined a color calculated to make any one glance into the nearest arithmetic as a relief to the sense of sight.

"My vanity is gone," said Dagmar to herself, "it it not worth while in such a place even to powder my nose." She sighed and looked down at her feet, and just then the principal, Mr. Martin Plunkitt, came into the room.

In a flash she saw that he had a queer hair cut, a nice grin, that he was young, and that he admired her.

"Organizing an eighth-grade alumni association," he said when she had finished her explanation—"that might be great stuff." He looked at her with a serious respect, which Dagmar greatly enjoyed.

She wondered if he were married, not that she had even a hidden idea of marrying him herself, but that she believed, partly because she had read a great many novels and partly because she was ever inclined to overestimate her charms, that married men were, almost all, tired of their wives and prone to fall in love with her. For this reason she had

boasted to Margaret once that she never accepted the attentions of married men. Margaret had taken it as an innuendo and had flared into a violent rage. Dagmar thought that married women, older women, were at a disadvantage in the competition for men, and so she elaborately and very conceitedly withdrew from the field when another woman seemed obviously to want some man that Dagmar did not want.

". . . An intellectual young lady like you can readily see," she heard him say and realized with dismay that she had no idea what he had expected her to understand, and still less of a notion whether he was favorably inclined toward organizing the association she had suggested.

"Yes, yes," she said hurriedly, nodding wisely.

"However," he went on frowning ponderously; "I think a thing like that should be left to the judgment of the children and so you might come upstairs to the classroom now and speak to them."

Dagmar had never been intimate with any children. She had no natural talents in handling children, and she felt a slight, unaccustomed embarrassment, which she was far from showing as she followed Mr. Plunkitt with great dignity up about a hundred steps on the way to deliver her first speech.

The principal faced the children with great condescension and was rewarded with a close attention. "This young lady has something to say to you, which I hope you will all consider carefully," he said. "In a few months you are about to go out into the world, to break the ties that have held you here for eight years, perhaps never to see each other again. Miss Hallowell has a suggestion to make about that and she will now speak to you."

Dagmar rose to her feet with her knees weak under her as fifty pair of hard, curious eyes bored into her, with an expression of frozen politeness, which she fancied hid an enormous contempt for her personal appearance and a sceptical prejudice against her ideas before they were uttered.

"Many of the graduating classes this year," she began in sugared tones, "are feeling, as Mr. Prizman —Mr. Plunkitt, suggested . . ." here a boy in the back of the room snickered and a curious expression chased itself over forty-nine faces to be instantly repressed. "Many of the classes in the city feel that they will want to have some way of meeting, after their days at grammar-school are over; and so I am organizing eighth-grade alumni associations" (they don't understand what those words mean, she thought in a panic)—"and so we are thinking of organizing a club." (Do they know organizing?)

"You see, your class would be a club, and you could have meetings every week or probably every month, and get together and have a party or play games, and so you would never forget your grammar-school friends. Now"—she gasped for breath—"Mr. Plunkitt wanted me to ask you whether you would like to do that or not; do you think you would?"

Not a face moved, not a muscle twitched. Dagmar sat down, feeling that this was the most miserable failure she had ever made of anything. Mr. Plunkitt rose to his feet with urbanity. "All those who would like to organize such a club, stand up!" he suggested. No one stood up. "Come, come," he said with a trifle of irritation. "Wouldn't you like to form a club and have meetings next year, William?" he inquired of a long, blank-looking boy in the first row. "Yes, sir," said William. William stood up. "Who else would like to join the club?" inquired Mr. Plunkitt jovially. Half a dozen more children rose, and the rest looked uneasy. "I don't think they understand very well," whispered Martin Plunkitt. "I'll have their teacher explain it to them this afternoon, and then they can vote on it." Dagmar crept shamefacedly out of the room after the principal.

"If it is true," she wrote in her report that week (for she was about to quote one of Mrs. Jones's fa-

vorite generalizations) "that all men in the teaching profession are either petty men who like authority, or else very big men who are sacrificing themselves for the sake of education, then Mr. Martin Plunkitt, principal of the Prizman School, belongs to the latter class."

This sentence, put in as it was, to please Mrs. Jones, was more suggestive than it was actually true, for Dagmar was never actually able to make up her mind whether she had discovered in Martin a truly great man—"great soul" he would have said—or merely, as she confided to Will in a letter, "a plain nut." For he was like no one that she had ever seen before and would not fit into any of her categories. But from the moment his eyes flashed on her, lighting his somewhat plain face with unmistakable admiration, Dagmar was warmed with a real interest, a sincere interest such as she had not before met in Chicago.

It was an Irish face, Dagmar thought, and yet there was a heaviness about Martin Plunkitt that is not often found in an Irishman. It was not that he was bull-necked (for he was that) but rather that his wits seemed to lumber heavily like a bull attempting to gambol about in a meadow with some frolicsome young colts. Dagmar learned afterward that his mother was German, and had perhaps given him that

dogged persistence which he displayed, and which he demonstrated so futilely by trying, always trying, to acquire a light touch, a humor, a wit, a thing, which (he being incapable of nourishing a whim, or if he had been, of gratifying one), he called "whimsicality."

Martin aspired to lead the life of a James Huneker. Oh, to drink Pilsener at midnight with an opera star, or a French bandit! Or to listen to strange music in a curious studio in Washington Square in company with Paderewski, and possibly Mary Garden. Or to go journeying into Paris, to call himself Jim, the Penman; for he knew his "Steeplejack" by heart as only youth can know the precious volume which epitomizes its dreams.

Dagmar, though, only noticed that he was more agreeably dressed than most principals, younger, and that it was nice to meet a man capable of admiring her after all the dreary wasted weeks. The look in his eyes acted like a switch, turning on the full flood of Dagmar's charm.

They had luncheon together in the penny-lunch room, where hundreds of eager-faced, crowding children stood impatiently in line waiting to get into their places at the long wooden benches. Everything, from the delicious soup to the cookies, was a penny, and Martin, with a vigorous thoroughness, explained everything to her with a correctness of

phrasing that was precise, even when he threw in a slang phrase; it was as if he had read in a book that the best people used slang these days, and had decided to put a suitable amount into his conversation.

Dagmar spent the day at the Prizman School, bored by Martin's account of it, and slightly weary from climbing stairs, looking into dull sewing-rooms. Her enthusiasm was raised for an instant by the inspection of a five-room apartment in connection with the domestic-science classes, which, she was told, the advanced classes used as a laboratory for actual experiment.

"They cook in the kitchen, they make the beds . . . ." Martin explained it to her fifty times over. But she enjoyed the fact that she was evidently making an impression on Martin, and so stood the physical discomfort with a certain bravery, for Dagmar hated to be tired and in stuffy air, and felt herself to be tinged with the glory of the sainted martyrs when she tolerated them.

They were friends when they parted and Dagmar had confided the dreadful story of her martyrdom in the dun-colored boarding-house, her lack of friends, and it was understood that Martin was going to call on her.

CHAPTER THREE

CAFETERIA ROMANCE

Dagmar abandoned her schedule after a few more dismal attempts to live up to it. She did not deliberately let this admirable and mathematical regulation of her life go, so much as she gradually forgot all about it. The necessity for the rigors of an existence unadorned by masculinity had gone, for Dagmar, for the first time in three weeks and five days (for all this time had passed since she left St. Paul), was engaged in the business of having a beau.

Martin Plunkitt had telephoned her one day and she had noticed a lumbering kittenishness in his manner as he asked her if it would be convenient for her to see him that night. His manner was eager, even intimate, over the phone, probably because he visualized the ideal of her that Dagmar had imprinted on him without being slightly awed by her presence, and was able to confide to her that he recognized her as belonging to one of his far-flung clan.

Dagmar was slightly puzzled, but when he came that night she saw that far-flung was as indispensable to his conversation as was the high-sounding

phrase, the mouthy sentence. He had tramped about the world, he said, in many countries; he had sweltered under many suns; which meant, as Dagmar discovered later, that he had spent his summer vacations in travelling as a floating laborer, and was probably referring to the differences in weather between North Dakota and Texas because he had never set foot outside of the United States. Martin was not lying, he was just carried away by words, for with all his aspirations toward higher things—"And of all aspirers," Dagmar wrote Will, "he is the world's worst!"—Martin was genuinely honest.

Martin took Dagmar to dine at Mary's Fish Palace, a basement restaurant which looked out upon the Chicago River and where they were served with a very good dinner of fried fish. Martin glowed with joy over the place and told Dagmar that he imagined a middle-class family at the next table were probably "second-story workers." Another person, he felt sure, was a poet, because his hair grew rather long on his neck.

"I like this place because it has atmosphere," said Martin with gusto. "Don't you?"

Dagmar did. It was a very dim reproduction of what she had hoped for in the way of "Bohemia." "Greenwich Village" in the city. She was about to reply when Martin shook himself and remembered

that he was taking a girl out to dine and must begin to entertain her at once.

"Have you ever heard the story," he began, "of the farmer who was taking some hogs to market, and met a friend who asked him how much he expected to get? He replied" . . . here Martin gave a terrific imitation of the old farmer who had evidently talked in a high nasal twang.

This was the first of a series, the flow of which Dagmar, who was hoping to talk about herself in a romantic narrative style, could not stem. Martin would interrupt to tell her about two Germans in a beer-garden and what they said to each other. For Martin had not suffered through an American high school, where the popular boys were able to turn off light jokes, for nothing. He had formed a few rules by which he lived. He also had one or two minor little remarks which he made while he ate: "May I press you to a jelly?" and "I'm clubfooted. I belong to so many clubs!"

Dagmar was not fond of walking. This was a disappointment to Martin, because walking is an exercise both romantic and cheap. It was a trifle cold to ride about on the top of a motor bus and say romantic things. His only recourse was to seek out "strange, curious" places, where the food was inexpensive, to which to take her for dinner.

In this way he took her to a particularly stuffy cafeteria one night, where two somewhat wistful-looking boys played the piano and the violin together, alternating such selections as, "Humoresque," "Forgotten," "To a Wild Rose," "The Rosary," and "The End of a Perfect Day" with a fast jazz, during which the violin was abandoned for a light drum. When the drum came on, people rose from all sides of the room and jammed themselves together on the floor, wriggling around as best they could in the confusion, presumably in time with the music, and, of course, paired into couples, as is the custom. Martin had picked this basement cafeteria, enlivened by its insufficient jazz orchestra, as the theatre in which to tell Dagmar about his ideals and also his inmost dreams. The business of picking up an aluminum tray, a thick white plate, eating utensils wrapped in a rough but virgin white napkin, and walking past a counter where food was displayed for the purpose of choosing what they would eat, took up some time; but when they were seated cosily at a small table in a corner Martin began the preliminary skirmishes in the matter of baring his soul.

He began by telling Dagmar that he always thought of her as "Eyes O' Blue"—a title which he had, as a matter of fact, picked out for her with a great deal of mental labor. "For," he went on in

a manner a little reminiscent of the normal-school debating society, of which he had been a member, "it seems to me often that your blue eyes are looking at me straight and steadily when we are apart. And sometimes you whisper to me."

"Glad I don't appear cross-eyed," mumbled Dagmar, somewhat ashamed for Martin, whom she rather liked.

It had no effect. "Yes, you're beautiful, Eyes O' Blue, with the beauty of youth and strength——"

"And a few cosmetics," added Dagmar, determined to shake him out of his absurdity. For it was evident, even to Dagmar (whose capability for exaggerating the degree of her own attraction was enormous) that Martin was more in love with the shining sentences he was delivering than he was with the subject of them.

"And your rainbow humor!" said Martin, triumphantly inventing a phrase on the spot. "I would like to write a long poem about you, what you are doing and thinking and dreaming. I wonder. Do you know when I am lonely I go to a little house that I keep on a hill, far off over the far-flung plains. In my imagination I go there with the people I love best . . . with you, and my sister Marthena"—he broke off, "I wish you knew Marthena!"

"What's she like?" asked Dagmar, and Martin

began a description of his sister that stirred a sympathetic and somewhat curious chord in Dagmar.

In telling about his sister, Martin told something of his life—a life which for Dagmar did not possess one glimmer of beauty, romance, or even of that valuable element which Dagmar called "a good time."

She felt, as he went on, a pitying curiosity, which he was far from suspecting, because to him it held the simple romance of the Up-and-Coming, Strive-and-Succeed, type of fiction.

The son of a country storekeeper, increasingly in debt, Martin had gone to work at the age of twelve, spurred on by his mother, who was filled with ambition for all her three children. The elder Plunkitt had been a genial easy soul of no great brilliancy, who liked to talk about Ireland, a country for which Martin's German mother could only feel contempt.

They lived above the store and were looked down upon in the village as a worthless lot. Martin came to the city, first to Joliet, Illinois, where he worked in a store and went to high school, and then to Chicago, where, through the influence of a schoolteacher, he had been inspired to go into the profession himself. He had got through the normal school, working all the time and sending money home, and was now supporting his mother and buying a house in Reliance, Illinois.

His sister Marthena had gone through her first year at high school and had stopped at the age of sixteen. At first she had worked in the store, but as there was no money for her in that occupation, she had gone into another store in the town, and once had tried to learn stenography. But she was ambitious and wanted to come to Chicago and get a job. Martin was considering bringing her up with him. He had only been waiting to find some nice girl to be a friend to her; some one near her own age.

He looked at Dagmar wistfully. "I'd love to meet her," said Dagmar impulsively. The intrinsic wistfulness and ingenuous desire to rise in the world, displayed by Martin in the narration touched a sympathetic chord in Dagmar; because, in spite of her laziness, in spite of her selfish tendencies, the underlying quality in Dagmar was one of dissatisfaction with herself, crossed with a vague hope that she would some day do something that was worth doing. It was this nebulous wish that had beckoned her to Chicago quite as much as the desire for adventure and the hope of seeing Palomon Bennett.

With all his desire to be whimsical, yet profound and intellectual, Martin still cherished a practical side to his nature, supposedly to be observed only in those "one hundred percenters, those forward

lookers," whom Martin had painstakingly learned to despise. This sense enabled him to realize that if any one could assist his sister Marthena in becoming a charming, poised, and slender hostess, it was Dagmar. It was like Martin to think of his sister in her coming happy state, not as a woman, but a hostess, and like him to hope for a wonderful physical transformation (for she was inclined to be a little stout).

"Would you really like to meet her?" asked Martin eagerly.

"I'd love to," said Dagmar sincerely, thinking dimly of the delightful contrast she would make to the rural Marthena. "I wish I could."

"If you'd come home with me," began Martin timidly, "I generally go home over week-ends, you could meet her, and my mother, too. It's probably different from anything you've ever known and you might find it amusing." The last phrase with its attempt at sophistication fell incongruously, as so many phrases did issuing from his honest and somewhat stolid face.

"Where is it?" asked Dagmar. "And how long does it take to get there."

"About three hours," said Martin eagerly. "It's a small town, but I'm sure you will find many odd, strange, whimsical characters there. To a girl of

your sort it will be almost like reading a novel by William J. Locke."

Curiosity stirred in Dagmar to see this whimsical Illinois village. Anything, she reflected, would be better than another dismal week-end in the chill unfriendliness of the boarding-house. Before the evening was over, she had promised to visit the Plunkitt home in Reliance, Illinois, and to meet Marthena Plunkitt the next week-end.

As she crept into bed that night the heavy loneliness of the room was attenuated by the thought of a possible new and completely adoring friend. The warm pleasurable suffusion of altruism seemed to envelop her body as she thought that perhaps she had at last found something that she could really do. She could take this country girl, whose aspirations for a wider life had hitherto been suppressed, and help her to do what she wanted to do in the world. A spectacular transformation before the eyes of the boarding-house girls floated before her eyes. They would see what they might have become, she fatuously and rather revengefully thought, if they had taken advantage of their contact with Dagmar Hallowell. "I have been to school and I do know a lot of things—silly things, of course," her sense of form made her append rather insincerely "—and if I can help this girl, and maybe

other girls—" for her imagination had leaped beyond Marthena Plunkitt and she was already staring down into a valley of grateful girlish faces, made lovely and appealing by the Dagmar touch.

A picture of Marthena came to her in a sleepy vision—a tired, pale-looking little girl, small-featured and inclined to be somewhat drab. A little rouge, a new way of doing the hair, a few hints on conduct from Dagmar, and lo! Marthena, charming, gracious, and beautiful, would exist where there had been just a colorless nonentity.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELIANCE

"Wheaton, Aurora, Jamaica, London, I suppose Martin knows them all by heart," thought Dagmar as she looked out on the platform of a little station that was like ten other little stations where the wheezing old train had already stopped. Martin's supply of anecdotes about these towns was unlimited, and he did not stint himself in his relation of them. Not once did he stop to praise Dagmar's personal charms, and she, quite naturally, was getting a little tired of it. Now and then some person who had achieved a moderate fame would figure in the stories, and then Martin's voice reflected a fitting deference to greatness.

"Reliance is the third station after this," Martin finally announced joyously. And when the train had once more rumbled to a stop, he did not neglect to say with unabated zest, "Reliance is the second stop after this," until finally, after half an hour more of seemingly purposeless meandering through the fields of Illinois, Martin and Dagmar at last successfully descended to the wooden platform of the railway station of the town itself.

A surly-looking lad in overalls was doing something to some assorted baggage that was being taken off the train. He took no notice of Martin, until he was hailed with: "Howdy, Steve! Good hunting!" He turned, and with a swift, shamed glance at Dagmar gave a bashful shake of the body at Martin together with a look of defiant bewilderment. Good hunting!

"That's old Steve Burlingame, brother of the town drunkard," explained Martin happily. He was determined that Dagmar should not miss a single whimsical village character. Steve slunk away, and Martin, who had built up a mildly fictitious character around each one of the twelve hundred inhabitants of the village, explained as many of them as they encountered to Dagmar while they picked their way over the cinders and came out on the principal street, which was narrow and lined with flimsy-looking stores.

It was the moment just before twilight, when the whole world seems to glow with a quality of outstanding pastels, and to Dagmar the village looked like a painted village; a stage-setting rather than an actual street. The buildings seemed made of cardboard, and the colors of them looked too bright, the signs were too easily readable, and for perhaps one second Dagmar was swept into Martin's romantic

conception of it all, for there was a hush just then, as if the curtain had just gone up on the world.

Afterward she said that it was exactly like a hundred other towns through which she had motored in Minnesota and Wisconsin, for her impression speedily faded as the evening quickly darkened and they hurried up the streets accompanied by Martin's interminable comments. "Guess I'd better stop at the butcher's and get some meat for dinner, as mother may not have enough for company," said Martin.

"Isn't she expecting me?" asked the startled Dagmar as they turned in at a lighted shop, where two women eyed Dagmar and were introduced to her, as was the butcher. They smiled and murmured, "pleased to meet you," and the butcher leered in a sympathetic manner, unmistakably as if he thought that Dagmar and Martin were going to be married.

There were ten more introductions before they reached what Martin called "The Store"—a dilapidated building almost on the edge of town, owned by Martin's father, where an incredible number of useless household articles were displayed beside a counter containing indigestible candies. It had been for forty years what was called a general store, and the elder Plunkitt, a half-witted old man now,

wandered pathetically about it, with his old shoulders stooping drearily, mumbling interminably to himself. An Irishman, discouraged by four decades of an ambitious German wife, the elder Plunkitt had gone almost completely out of his mind and clung to the store, which was hopelessly out of date in enterprising Reliance, as the only thing he loved. He would wander about the rooms above it where the family had precariously lived before the success of Martin had brought to them a comparative prosperity, talking to himself amid the rat-infested corridors, where the falling plaster made such expeditions increasingly dangerous, thinking, heaven knows what thoughts and avoided as much as possible by his rapidly developing family.

About the figure of his father, Martin did not attempt to throw any romantic veil, though five years later the village newspaper reported the dramatic incident of the arrival of Martin Plunkitt at his father's funeral just as the body was being lowered into the grave, when he flung a single rose down on to the casket and was led away weeping. But that day his imagination seemed to fail him as he looked at his father, and no whimsical characterization of the old man fell from his lips.

Martin's brother Ed came into the store while Dagmar and Martin were there. He seemed not at

all surprised to see his brother, although he had evidently not expected him. "Hello, Martin," was all he said; and "pleased to meet cha," to Dagmar, with an absence of the knowing look that the rest of the villagers had cast at Dagmar. It was plain that he, at least, did not expect Dagmar to marry Martin.

Ed was the chief of police of Reliance, and he offered to show Dagmar the jail the next day. "I'm going to take her to Big Thunder Cliff," said Martin eagerly.

"What! Oh, you mean Haynie's cow pasture? Yeah. Martin's named all the places different names," he remarked apologetically to Dagmar. "Indian names, and it's kinda hard to keep track of them. . . . But, say, for its size, this town's got the classiest jail. No one in it, though!"

"Don't you ever have any one in it?"

"Very seldom. I got the keys to it, and me and some fellows I know goes down and has a game of poker and a drink there once in a while. Oh, yup, we did lock up a guy there last month, but only overnight. He was drunk while speeding, and going through town. . . ."

The air was full of the fine gray powder that seems to envelop the world in that moment before it is completely dark, and they were crossing a rustic

bridge over Snake Creek—"Wild Tulip Brook," as Martin called it. In the remnant of light, the bridge was a graceful entrance to a leafy tunnel, imagined romantic, like a drawbridge to a palace of Greenwood.

And there, on the bridge, they met Marthena.

Her laugh rippled out into the night, and through the sentence, "Hello, Martin. Oh, I'm glad to meet you. Martin has talked so much about you." And rippled on without dying away.

"Yes, your brother has told me of you, too," replied Dagmar with a certain smugness.

The laugh came again. "Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho," it descended the scale on a breath and began again to transude the words "I'm sure I can't imagine what he can have told you!"

In the dim light Dagmar could make out an over-developed figure of the type which might have been used to caricature the mode in women's figures of about 1890—a shady hat which she suspected of being made of black lace, worn with a certain air of being in the fashion.

They walked along together chatting commonplaces, Dagmar with her sweetest, most appealing manner, and Marthena Plunkitt, gaily, with the ease of one enjoying herself thoroughly.

They reached the house, a white house on a cor-

ner, of which it somehow came to Dagmar that they were all very proud. She knew from the way they mentioned the lilac bush that they were elated by the possession of a house with a lilac bush on it, and that the old porch, when they had stepped up the two steps that raised it above the ground, was a porch of which all three were mysteriously and happily conscious of savoring the joy of ownership.

How could Dagmar know that the Plunkitt family, after fifteen years in the stuffy atmosphere of a flat above the old store, playing, even in that small village, on the sidewalks as children, were, for the first time, united as a family with a home of their own? The door opened and she saw a cheap oak piano. How could she know how proud Marthena was to have this girl from the city come and see that they, like every one else, had a piano, had a dining-room which they ate in, an up-stairs, a room for Marthena alone? Dagmar could never know these things. But she could dimly sense something of the thrill that pervaded the air; even if she could not understand it.

And now, in the light, Dagmar saw Marthena for the first time. She gave an impression of native merriness held down by a ponderous sense of her own inferiority—a gaiety that was not able to loose itself from Marthena and flow to its natural out-

let, which took its revenge upon her by making a natural joyousness appear to be silliness. "She has a nice skin," thought Dagmar, "but she's too fat!" Her healthy voluptuousness had no fashionable appeal, but in an age with less perverted standards of feminine beauty, Marthena might have won many points from Dagmar. But never could she have triumphed over Dagmar if she had been one hundred times as beautiful, for Dagmar was mentally a beauty, with the belief in her own attractiveness interpenetrated through every grain of her, while Marthena was one of those people who should have repeated a slogan each morning to reassure herself.

Mrs. Plunkitt, intermittently called "Maw," "Mama," and "Mother," was a little, busy, loving person who slipped into her background, became part of the background, and yet was somehow the hub around which they all revolved; still important, though Paw, Papa, Father, lost in his own ineptitudes, was nothing any more to his family. He sat at dinner staring into the midst of the chatting that poured on and on around him, and when the meal was over retired, without a word, to his bedroom.

They adjourned to the front room, and Dagmar was asked to play the piano. She played a little, as she had been brought up in the tradition that every girl child is musical and had later used her knowl-

edge against her family by adding a choppy syncopation to her technic and playing constantly all the current jazz.

Martin leaned over the piano, his solid heaviness not quite as effective as it might have been in that position if he had been long and willowy. He whispered to Dagmar:

"Can you play chords?"

"What?"

"Chords," repeated Martin mysteriously. "You know I hum tunes and you accompany me. "He laughed his sudden engaging boyish laugh and said through it: "I've written some tunes!"

At that moment Dagmar liked him thoroughly, for he seemed in some miraculous way to detach himself from his lumbering seriousness. When he found that Dagmar could not only accompany him but could play the songs he had written on the piano, he was overjoyed.

"Those were heart-beats set to music only played on
golden strings,"

sang Martin.

"Did you write the words, too?" asked Dagmar.

He nodded, and continued:

"That seemed to whisper sweet and soft, and memories
comfort brings.

I seem to see my dear old father, and my heart breaks as he sings.
Those heart-beats set to music that were meant for golden strings."

He reddened when he had finished but seemed proud of them. "I hope to sell them some day and maybe just write songs for a living."

"There's lots of money in songs," said Marthena.

"Here's another." He hummed the tune through for Dagmar and she played while he sang:

It's a long, long road to heart's desire;
But that blue-eyed girl of mine
Has eyes aglow with love's own fire,
Harbors of love divine—
And her look would melt a rolling stone.
No angel could be higher,
And she's waiting there for me alone
On the road to heart's desire.

The melodies were as hackneyed as the words, and Dagmar caught them easily. She liked them because they were like all the rest of the popular songs of the more sentimental sort, and put Martin into ecstasies by saying so.

She played old things that the Plunkitts knew, and they all sang. Marthena, who was taking music-lessons, could not yet play. They hovered over her, they surrounded her with admiration, and Dagmar

responded to it all with a liking that was faintly contemptuous.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Plunkitt summoned them to the dining-room where cake and ice-cream lay upon the table. It was like a party, and as they were all in high, gay spirits, it was a party. And then Martin ceremoniously took Dagmar on his midnight walk to Big Thunder Cliff.

The February air was damply invigorating. They walked along swiftly down a country road blacker than any that Dagmar had ever seen. "Turn here," said Martin, and in the enveloping darkness she was unable to make out which way he had gone. He seized her arm, and they turned into a way where the footing was very precarious. "To our right is the haunted house," he whispered, and Dagmar shivered, though she ought to have known that the house would not be even traditionally haunted. They were, as Martin's brother Ed could have told them, making their way through the cow pasture of an eminent citizen named Haynie; but in the darkness, Dagmar did not know what perilous and exciting way they might be treading. She knew that they were going up, for her body felt the strain of the climb, but she was not prepared to have Martin say, with an accompanying jerk to her arm: "You nearly fell, that time, into Big Thunder Gully." In a hushed

voice he told her to lie down on her stomach and look over the edge of Big Thunder Cliff. From an assortment of grunts, it was evident that Martin was doing it. She lay down obediently, but could see nothing, and was obsessed by a nervous feeling that she might edge over into Big Thunder Gully if she moved. She lay, straining her eyes into the darkness, shivering from cold, and unable to feel the awe of nature and her own smallness, which Martin was talkatively experiencing.

"I want to tell you a dream of mine," said Martin. "Something I've never told you before."

Dagmar sneezed.

"It's about the Pirate's cave," said Martin, "and ——"

He paused for encouragement from Dagmar, but she interrupted: "Martin, I'm dreadfully cold, and I'm scared stiff I'm going to fall and break my neck. Let's go back."

He was slightly aggrieved. "Well, come on."

"Heavens, I can't come, I'm afraid I'll fall!" He reached for her and pulled her upward toward him. For a moment she thought he was going to kiss her, but he didn't. They trod the path downward in silence until they came to the road.

"Here's the haunted house," said Martin cheerfully, and they were soon home.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PIRATE'S DEN

The room in which Dagmar awoke the next morning was pleasant with cool February sunshine, and cosily old-fashioned under its low, slanting ceiling. The blue-and-white curtains at the windows matched the bed covering and the scarfs on the table and marble-topped dresser. And a curtain of the same material had been made on some industrious person's sewing-machine to hang over the box-like wardrobe that stood in one corner. It was a girl's room, unmistakably, and a rather sentimental girl she was, to judge by the number of colored prints that hung on the wall of young ladies dressed in the fashion of about 1908 undergoing various preliminaries to matrimony. She had gone to sleep beside Marthena in a double bed to the sound of the suppressed but eager tones of Marthena engaged in the relation of various anecdotes totally without interest to Dagmar. As she opened her sleepy eyes she could hear Marthena singing down-stairs in a high uneven soprano which probably made her throat very sore.

Marthena had confided the night before that she was anxious to learn what she called social culture.

"I know lots of things already," she had said naïvely, "like not sticking your little finger out when you're drinking a cup of coffee. I suppose you know all those things?"

"I don't know," Dagmar had muttered, smiling to herself in the darkness. And yet, in spite of a somewhat helpless amusement, she sympathized with Marthena and hoped to be able to help her. "Though just what I can do, I don't know," thought Dagmar, "her clothing is too fancy, of course"; but she did not feel inclined to tell Marthena this. In spite of her glib questions there was nothing really confiding about Marthena, and there was a hint in her manner that she might not take kindly to the criticism that she asked for. "I wonder what they expect me to do?" she thought, for the vision of Dagmar, the charm expert, was already fading. Though as yet Dagmar had seen no actual sign of the spirit of wistfulness which Martin had described his sister as possessing, the idea of it still held Dagmar's interest. Ordinarily, she would have said, "A fat girl who giggles," and dismissed Marthena from her mind, but Martin's account of her had made her think of Marthena's unpleasing exterior as a tightly sealed vessel for a really beautiful character.

While she was dressing, Marthena came into the room, giggling, and sat on the bed to watch her.

She commented on the contents of Dagmar's travelling bag, and it was evident that Dagmar's underwear roused an admiration amounting almost to a religious awe.

"Would you advise me to have my eyebrows pulled?" she asked anxiously. "Some people say I'd look better, but mother thinks I ought not to do it." She looked dishevelled and disagreeably untidy, perched there on the edge of the bed, though an impartial judge would have been compelled to award her a much higher mark in both neatness and tidiness than he could have given Dagmar. But the pictorial quality of Dagmar's disorder was never irritating to the eye. And just as paradoxically, Marthena, though actually a few months younger than Dagmar, seemed older on account of an appearance of indeterminate youth. For Dagmar's greatest charm was her definite youngness.

Marthena was without that power of loosing the sympathetic currents of friendship and love which Dagmar possessed in such abundance. Dagmar was to learn that at moments Marthena became conscious of this, and tried, by beating her fists against the implacable and freezing vacuum, which seemed to surround her, to break her way through into the ranks of beautiful and charming women. And later it was only in these periods of

wretched realization that Dagmar remembered at all the wistful girl that Martin had described. For on most occasions Marthena regarded herself with an optimism that was to Dagmar's superficial observation a boundless conceit.

After her noon breakfast, Dagmar went with Martin to the house of some people who sold cream to buy some for dinner.

He went to the front door, removed his hat, stood with a certain gallantry on the door-step. "I'm Martin Plunkitt," he began. The angular woman in the doorway looked down at the bottle in his hand. "The cream's round in back at the barn," she remarked and closed the door.

Martin was undaunted. He went joyously around and told the man in the barn that he was Martin Plunkitt. No casual, whimsical countryside conversation developed. None developed while Dagmar was in Reliance, though Martin told her that he was in the habit of having many of them.

"Ah, here comes my Helen of Troy," exclaimed Martin as a slant-eyed girl with shining black hair coiled smoothly on the back of her neck came demurely along the narrow brick walk toward them with a shy self-possession. There was an illusive, Oriental prettiness about her, as if she would have passed well in the movies for a Japanese girl. "Miss

Orsi," pronounced Martin with his most solemn introductory manner, "meet Miss Hallowell."

"Miss Hallowell," repeated the girl with a mysterious upward look of amusement that roused Dagmar's momentary interest, though she afterward learned that the mystery was as bogus as the Oriental look about her, for she was the daughter of a wealthy Greek who owned a cigar store in Reliance, and was striving as intensely as the Irish Catholics of Reliance to be American.

"That's Marthena's best friend, Ida Orsi," said Martin. "A perfect Grecian type. She's coming to Chicago to study dressmaking, this fall, and maybe Marthena is coming with her. I don't know, though. She's not just the girl for Marthena to be with." He lowered his voice. "She has no soul," he confided.

Dagmar looked astonished. "I should think it would be nice for Marthena to have a friend with her," she said.

Martin nodded. "That's just it. But she needs a higher type of girl. She needs some one who would be a constant inspiration to her like you would. I hope you will see a lot of Marthena when she comes to the city."

"I hope so, too," said Dagmar politely. "Will you have her with you?"

They were approaching the house, and Martin wrinkled his brows and smiled at her: the most

whimsical combination of expressions he knew. "I'll take this cream in the house, and then would you like to walk?" he said. And, without waiting for her to answer, ran around the house to the back door and joined her again almost immediately.

"Your question," said Martin as they walked over the muddy country road, for they were going to go and look at Big Thunder Cliff in the daytime, "is rather curious, because it bears on something I was thinking of talking to you about." He drew a long breath and looked around in search of more imposing material for his introductory remarks. "Last night," he said, "I told you that I wanted to tell you about the Pirate's Den. And the Pirate's Den is one of the dreams dearest to my heart of hearts!

"High up under the eaves of a tall gray sky-scraper in New York there are a few simple attic rooms filled with the treasures of many voyages. These rooms are gay with the light voices of many happy people, and the atmosphere there is that of Bohemia unalloyed—do you get the picture?" queried Martin anxiously. "For it is a description of the Pirate's Den!"

They were approaching a wide plateau overhanging a ten-foot drop onto a soft clay floor. In the distance, the trees, faintly gray against the February sky, outlined the tops of the hills. Many of them were bleak and lifeless as telephone-poles, but others

had a certain gaunt vitality that seemed to feel the implicit spring.

"This," Martin interrupted himself to say before Dagmar could answer his question, "is Big Thunder Cliff." Dagmar looked over the drop which no child would have hesitated to have made, and felt somewhat ashamed of her fright the night before. She shivered a little with a breeze that unexpectedly seemed to rise from across the sloping plain behind her, and lost track of Martin's remarks for a moment or two. ". . . hitherto the Pirate's Den has always existed in just one place for me. And that place is New York. But lately I've come to think that perhaps it could be in Chicago with you and with Marthena."

"What do you mean," said Dagmar. "Where in Chicago?"

"Yonder is the hill I have told you about," answered Martin, pointing off to the north. "Flamingo Hill, I have named it, because in the fall, the most glorious color outlines it, just like the feathers of that brilliant bird, the flamingo. Yes'm" said Martin, "in Chicago. Surely a bright spirit like you would be happier in such a place as the Pirate's Den than in the dreary unhomelike confines of the boarding-house where you now live. Am I correct in supposing this?"

"Ye-es," admitted Dagmar slowly, though she had no idea what Martin meant and had a vague notion that he was proposing to her.

"Yes," said Martin decisively. "Then that's settled. Two girls I know, two very artistic young school-teachers have a very doggy apartment within walking distance of the loop. I have been to call upon them a few times and have been favorably impressed. Of course it now has nothing of the charm which we will give it, but with books and flowers and perhaps some odd, strange vases, it will be very like the Pirate's Den of my dreams."

"You mean Marthena and I would take this apartment together?" asked Dagmar.

"Yes, with a room for me entirely separate from it and opening off the main hall. What congenial souls we would gather together in our cosy living-room," said Martin enthusiastically. "Will you go and look at it some night soon?"

"I might look at it," said Dagmar doubtfully, but Martin's heartfelt and theatrically schoolboyish "Hurray" left her vaguely uneasy. She had not agreed to anything definite. She did not realize that once she even tentatively agreed to an arrangement of that sort it would be embarrassing to withdraw from it.

Marthena was sheepishly hilarious at the idea of

coming to Chicago and living with Dagmar. In the glow of Marthena's admiration and astonished pleasure in Dagmar's perfections, Dagmar's misgivings about the desirability of seeing Marthena constantly were driven deep into her and overlaid with the excitements of change, a possibility of a relief from the boarding-house, and the curiosity she felt toward any untried venture. She was young and had none of the sceptical distrust of such a relation nor any knowledge of the difficulty she might find in extricating herself from it that a more experienced girl might have had. The care-free American attitude which is so often and so well expressed in the phrase, "I'll try anything once," swayed Dagmar in this as it did many other times in her life when she was called upon to make a decision.

She parted from Marthena with many expressions of felicity on both sides, and though she did not realize it, it was already settled that the two girls would live together: the ball of circumstance had been sent rolling down the hill, and Dagmar could have withdrawn from the agreement only with a great deal of unpleasant explanation which would have called upon her for the self-exertion which she abhorred.

CHAPTER SIX

NUMBER NINE PEARSON STREET

"The Pirate's Den," thought Dagmar when she had returned to the city and was once more riding around on the street-cars in search of shadowy grammar-schools. "What an absurd idea! And I suppose it would be some perfectly awful place which Martin would gild with phrases and I would look at it and try to pretend it was romantic." She sighed, for she was really very lonesome and the thought of even Martin and Marthena was better than the unlimited supply of her own society in which she was once more being submerged. "I'm an amusing person," she thought, "but too much of me bores even myself." Her dreams of Pal were, except at intervals, becoming a trifle pale and shop-worn from lack of new inspiration. Even the one in which she greeted him ecstatically and welcomed him home had been rung through so many variations that dreaming it was like rereading a children's story once thrilling, in which all the fearful bugaboos are slightly ridiculous, and the amusing little funny men are seen to be only gabbling away at puns long since exhausted. The sparkle was temporarily gone

from this dream consolation that had for weeks given her an unrecognized happiness, and she went as miserably through the day after she had returned from Reliance as if she had been let back into a relentless grind after a gay week-end with delightful people. Instead of which, as she reassured herself dismally, she had come back to her beloved work for which she had given up everything.

"It is silly of me," she thought, when she was having a lonely dinner by herself in a restaurant. "Why in the world don't I go home? Any other girl with just common sense would have gone back ages ago." The insipid seeming faces of a dozen boys rose in her mind at the thought of St. Paul and the young vital Pal image erased them at once. "But he's not here," thought Dagmar dismally, "and I can't follow him across the country to New York. What in the world is the matter with me that I do such queer things?" The indefiniteness of her own actions puzzled her when she tried to be introspective, for she liked to think of herself as doing clear-cut, logical things, with easily traceable reasons like a heroine of fiction. Dagmar shared the intellectual craving of so many philosophers, insipient and otherwise, of discovering a unity in the shape of a large enveloping reason that would serve as a mainspring for every deed.

She would have liked to say: "I am the modern young woman who desires a career. For that I stay in Chicago, cut off from my friends, and for that I give up every pleasure." She would have liked to get up in the morning thinking: "I am the modern young woman, bounding out of bed to meet my important career." She would have liked to draw on her stockings ecstatically, thinking: "I am the modern young woman," to have brushed her hair to the rhythmic thought that she was vitally of her generation. But such pleasures pall, the dramatic pitch would not maintain itself, and she knew, to her dismay, that she was not interested in the school children of Chicago, except at those increasingly infrequent times when she was swayed by the mob spirit as expertly sprayed through the office by Mrs. Jones.

She would not have been the modern young woman at all if it had not occurred to her that perhaps she was sexually starved. "My true function is to bear children," would be her echo on these occasions. A muddled pride kept her from saying, "I am in love with one who is sure to return to this place and, therefore, I keep with him a sort of secret tryst."

The anæmic gaiety and pallid bustling of the restaurant around her seemed to be unreal as the

happenings on some far-off and colorless stage. If I were at home now, dining in public, I couldn't help seeing Bill Hessler or Jim Sweet, or somebody no matter where I went, and when I came out on the street I'd know—well—she hesitated as the fluctuating crowds of people in St. Paul whom she incredibly did not know floated across her mind—well, I'd know the doorman, anyway. Sentimental tears stood in her eyes as she pityingly thought of the gay Dagmar Hallowell being glad of even a doorman's welcome. "To-morrow I'll go home," said Dagmar vigorously. "I'm not going to stay around this town being lonesome when I don't have to."

Vaguely ashamed of her resolution, she paid her check and left the restaurant. "Yes, to-morrow I'll go home," she said as she doggedly tramped along Clark Street, wandering north in the indefinite belief that she was walking toward the boarding-house. "If just one person would speak to me and smile and say, How do you do, Dagmar, it wouldn't be so bad," thought Dagmar looking eagerly into the faces of the thugs and prostitutes who make up the aristocracy of the district through which she was passing. Unnecessary lights had just come out as if to ornament the blue translucent sky. All around the dirt and squalor had a painted

picturesque aspect, as if it had been overlaid with shellac and would not soil a pair of immaculate gloves. "Yes, I'm beaten," thought Dagmar, hanging her head as a fitting posture, and dragging her feet over the pavement. "To-morrow I'm going home."

But all this was not to be lost for want of an audience. "How do you do, Dagmar," said some one, and she looked up to find that Martin Plunkitt had overtaken her. "Just the time of evening," he said, "for you to come and see the Pirate's Den!"

Suddenly her melancholy left her. There were a million things to talk about with Martin. Coming in on the train they had both been too sleepy to talk much, and now there were all the impressions of her trip to tell him, all the events of her day. She walked beside him buoyantly, chattering gaily.

They left Clark Street and walked to the newer part of the town. The widened Michigan Avenue stretched before them with a broad, noble gesture, to the pale pointing finger of the Wrigley building outlined with lights, and looking in some intangible way at the same time majestic and irritating.

The broad, stone bridge gave them a vista of the dull-green marble river opening out generously to the endless blueness of Michigan. A lighted lake boat steaming importantly up the river lent an air

of bustle to the scene, and the people walking to and fro seemed to Dagmar to be like the citizens of some forgotten city of antiquity, moving among their strange magnificent buildings, unaware of their picturesque doom of oblivion. For at such moments as Dagmar was experiencing, all civilizations seem transient moments, phases in the dream of some God about to awaken.

They walked on. By this time Dagmar had grown silent, and Martin talked on unheeded by her. By the time they reached their destination, her feet were tired and she was again discouraged and disconsolate, but the sight of the building revived her.

A large, gray building of four stories, the entrance was through a narrow gateway of wrought iron, which led into an open stone-paved court. "In summer," whispered Martin, "the cool green shadows are fringed with ferns, and a fountain murmurs where you see that dancing-girl."

Dagmar looked down at the irregular design of the floor and thoughts of Italy and France flitted lazily through her mind. "It's Old World," she said excitedly.

"Old World, that's it," said Martin. "You've hit it exactly. I knew you'd like it."

"And the railings are like etchings," said Dagmar. Upward for four stories, balconies embraced the

walls and thin iron railings like pencil-marks against the white stone kept la Boheme from falling off the very narrow platforms, and breaking into little bits against the hard floor of the court.

They made their way upward to the studio apartments, Dagmar and Martin both re-echoing each other's joyful excitement. Inside were two large light rooms—"I have furniture for them," said Martin. In one, the larger one, Marthena and Dagmar were to sleep and the other was to be Martin's studio. "In time, perhaps, I can get a grand piano," said Martin. For a composer of music undoubtedly needs one, if only for scenery.

A burst of enthusiastic new life came to Dagmar. Here was a setting. Here was the place to have Pal find her when he returned from New York. And here was what she had come to Chicago to find. As a very young girl is sometimes hypnotized into marriage by the thought of magnificent new clothes and the period of parties and events in which she is to be the protagonist, Dagmar was dazzled by the idea of living in this new place so much that she overlooked the thought that she would perhaps not like her companions. "We could hang long thick curtains at the windows of a dull, queer blue," she said excitedly, and Martin broke in as eagerly: "Or I thought of having black curtains coming down

straight on each side and lying in a heap on the floor like a drawing in the Yellow Book."

"Oh, and a couch," said Dagmar; "we could have a long, low couch made to fit in under that window, and I've always been perfectly crazy to live in a house like this. Margaret has two old high chairs up in the attic that she's not using, and I've always been crazy to have some place to put them, and they'd go in here, and Margaret could send us just lots of things——"

They signed a lease the next morning, and a week later Marthena came down from Reliance and got a job in a mail-order house at fifteen dollars a week. Martin Plunkitt and John Patlock paid the rent, Margaret shipped down furniture out of the attic from the house on Summit Avenue, and so they were not obliged to use Martin's things, which, while they had the advantage of being odd, strange things, would perhaps have been neither if they had been less dilapidated.

Marthena was eagerly looking forward to her first pay-day when she could buy herself some clothes. She dreamed of them at night, those clothes that were to make her graceful, beautiful, attractive as Dagmar. She had come to Chicago in a new costume, painfully put together from old clothes in imitation of the plain smartness of Dagmar's tailored

suit. One glance at Dagmar had assured her that her own wardrobe was full of things that were all too cheaply fancy. Her cheap felt hat, stiff and awkward, was to her like the soft graceful fall of the thirty-dollar felt Dagmar had worn. Only when she saw Dagmar again did she realize how futile her efforts had been.

At the end of their first day in the new lodging Dagmar had arrived in a cab. "The street-cars are simply hectic at this time of night," she said. "Riding on them simply incapacitated me——"

Marthena stared at her. "Aren't you funny?" she said. "Don't you ever ride on the street-car?"

Dagmar was irritated. If she was going to condescend to live with Marthena, Marthena would have to keep in her proper place. "Of course I do," she snapped. "But I think it's outrageous to have to push your way through a mob."

Marthena's laugh held a faintly patronizing tinkle. "I never heard of such a thing. The cars are always crowded in the city."

Martin entered smilingly. "My thoughts of you all day have been like the sun dancing on far-travelled waters in June," he greeted her pleasantly.

"Martin always talks kind of crazy," said Marthena uneasily. "Say, Dagmar, are you going to keep your hat on for dinner?"

They were going to dine in a Greek restaurant near by, which Martin had recommended. Dagmar answered Marthena: "Why, yes, Marthena."

"Is that the thing to do?" asked Marthena. "Would it be wrong if I took mine off? Why don't you take yours off?"

"I prefer to keep it on," said Dagmar, whose tired nerves were becoming more and more irritated by Marthena's chatter, which was as incessant as a monkey's and through which ran a meaningless little laugh.

"But wouldn't you ever take it off?" persisted Marthena.

"I would if I wanted to," said Dagmar. "I always do what I want to do."

Marthena pondered. "But would it be good manners?" she asked.

Dagmar, though her conscience reproached her dimly for going back on her tacit agreement to teach Marthena just such things, was too infuriated by Marthena's insistence on the point to give her the simple answer she desired.

"It's impossible to attempt to be smart in a Greek restaurant," was her elliptical rejoinder, as she followed Martin who was already on his long journey down the stairs.

Marthena looked in the glass at herself and thought

deeply on Dagmar's words. She gathered that it would be perfectly correct for her to enter the restaurant without a hat. But then why hadn't Dagmar done it? A matter of choice perhaps. Anyway, Marthena didn't want Dagmar to think that she would copy her in everything. She decided not to wear the hat.

In the restaurant sat a fat middle-aged Jewess. At another table a woman who looked like a fifth-rate actress out of a job sat eating soup. Both of these women were hatted. Marthena was furious.

"It is the correct thing to wear a hat in a restaurant like this, and you never told me. You just wanted me to look foolish," she flung at Dagmar.

"But, my dear girl, haven't you ever eaten in a restaurant before?" asked the astonished Dagmar.

"No, not much except last night and once or twice before with Martin, and I never noticed. Besides I wanted to do the correct thing."

"It doesn't matter a bit," said Dagmar, a little touched as she saw how much it mattered to Marthena. "I'll take my hat off."

She removed her hat and Marthena relapsed into a state of adoration again. Dagmar's hair was the prettiest she had ever seen, and Dagmar generously explained about the henna. "And do you use rouge too? I thought nice girls never used rouge."

Dagmar was mollified and they spent a happy evening alone together. In her loneliness and her sudden new appreciation of what it would mean to be what she called an utterly commonplace person, Dagmar once more resumed her conception of herself as an inspiring example. She was too flighty and temperamentally nervous to remain always calm and superior in the face of criticism from a girl her own age, but she did under Marthena's streaks of obvious adoration become didactic in a faintly affectionate way.

But on the whole the experiment of putting the two girls together was, from the first, not a success. Dagmar who was accustomed to being amused by people who were concerned over problems of etiquette could not overcome a feeling of irritation to find herself actually living with such a person. And Marthena developed an intermittent hatred of Dagmar —not, as Dagmar thought, through jealousy, but through shame; she had poured over Dagmar one of the richest things in her nature—a whole-souled admiration—amounting, at the time, to worshipping love. And Dagmar, instead of being goddess-like in her acceptance of it, had underestimated Marthena's intelligence and had been contemptuous of her, showing herself as a mortal and forcing Marthena to the place of a worm. She could not forgive

herself for grovelling before Dagmar. She could not love Dagmar any more and still respect herself.

Dagmar had hopes of fixing Marthena up. They invaded a beauty parlor and Marthena was given a facial massage, her eyebrows were plucked, her hair was given what the tactful young woman called a wash. Dagmar corseted Marthena and lectured her. She gave her absurd pointers on conversation and how to carry herself. And Marthena improved. She improved—infinitesimally.

Sometimes they seemed to Dagmar to be two sordid, mean, spiteful girls bringing out each other's worst qualities. For Marthena, after Dagmar began to gather a little group of attentive boys around her, made Dagmar think her an outrageous liar because of the tales she told, of the men in Reliance who had loved her. And there was, also, she told the incredulous Dagmar, a boy in Elgin who might come down to see her.

Dagmar represented two things to Marthena. First an ideal of herself, an awe-inspiring, breathtaking wonder—the girl she hoped to become—and second, a maze of irritating bewildering qualities in just a girl that she had to live with. There was no clear thought in Marthena's feeling. She worshipped Dagmar, the Goddess, the sublimated self-image, and believed that a deep love was always a

part of any emotion she felt for the actual Dagmar. Thus she suffered the pangs of the betrayed friend, and the agony of self-pity descended in any quarrel between them. Quarrels that left Dagmar cold and with the weapon of scornful sarcasm reduced Marthena to a tearful pulp like that of the wronged and helpless wife.

Living together, perhaps through chance, but at least partially through choice, one of them drawn there from a motive with its noble aspect, the desire of aiding another human being to attain his ambitions, these two girls were fundamentally unable to understand each other.

This girl would not have possessed the outstanding unpleasant characteristics to Dagmar that she did possess, possibly, if she had been beautiful. For the mask of beauty not only covers minor flaws of character, it sometimes absorbs them, melts them into nothingness. Those weak places which were especially noticeable in the fabric of emotions, and strivings that were Marthena's might have been mended with just a little of the magic thread of beauty.

This Martha, striving desperately to be a Marthena, believed in her own intrinsic worth as an attractive and agreeable person, which was all she wanted to be after all. But her ineptitudes thwarted

her. At times she was frenzied by her inability to rise above the lump of flesh that appeared to be Marthena, and to dominate as she felt the true Marthena could dominate, through sheer might of charm. At other times she was hopeful of marvels; her features would change, become more agreeable while remaining, somehow, her features. A wonder-working corset would make her figure less lumpy, a magic book of etiquette would tell her what to do to make herself liked and adored. At these times the sight of Dagmar going her careless way, commanding homage as she went, maddened and exasperated her. And she would spend hours in bed crying while Dagmar tried to comfort her.

At these times she would sometimes grovel before Dagmar. "You've always had everything," she would sometimes sob. "If I were like you, had had your chances, I'd be wonderful too." These bits of homage softened Dagmar toward her after the most violent upbraidings from Marthena, for she was hysterical and emotional, and would go on inexhaustibly about herself and her desires. Dagmar, who, being without that particular grief of Marthena's, was philosophically able to master it, would impatiently and glibly repeat a few platitudes about Marthena being the captain of her soul.

In Marthena's desire to achieve the precision of

correctness she objected to Dagmar's smoking. The best people of Reliance did not smoke. "And you say damn," said Marthena, "and Hell, and those are things I've been brought up to believe that no lady ever says."

"I am not," said Dagmar, "thank heaven, a lady. Lady is another word that has gone out. Add that to your list of fascinating social blunders!"

"What do you mean, Dagmar Hallowell, I'm a perfectly respectable girl."

"Heavens, yes," said Dagmar recklessly. "When the trumpet blows and the names on the honor roll are being read off, you'll undoubtedly get middle-class mention."

Marthena looked alarmed, and puzzled. "What does that mean? I do belong to the middle class. That's nothing to be ashamed of!" She was secretly proud to think Dagmar had not said she belonged in the lower classes. Dagmar laughed and thought Marthena stupid, not realizing that such snobbish distinctions were merely beyond Marthena's present scope.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BELOVED BOY

A few days after her arrival in Chicago Mrs. Jones had said to Dagmar, "I want you to come out to my house to tea very soon and meet, and meet—" she paused and looked at Dagmar significantly—"the beloved boy!" She laughed in her blithe fashion. "I mean my son Alec. I'm perfectly foolish about him. He's in the University here, and he certainly does like the girls. He'll find you quite attractive, I'm afraid. Oh, young people, young people! But what would we do without them?"

But the weeks had gone by, and Mrs. Jones had not remembered to make her invitation a definite one. Her time was taken up with a great many conferences about her organization, and it was not until Dagmar had left the boarding-house and gone to live with Marthena that Mrs. Jones invited her to come to supper on Sunday evening and to bring along her friend with whom she was living.

Mrs. Jones lived in a house in the suburbs, full of square tiny rooms, marble-topped tables, distressed-looking plants, and probably the largest collection

of useless bric-à-brac in the city. Her large expansive nature successfully dominated her surroundings, which seemed to say: "We are a waste, but everything is a waste except the admirable Mrs. Jones."

"And this," said Mrs. Jones, "is the beloved boy!"

A short broad-shouldered youth, whose handsome blond head was noble in size and moulding, emerged from the furniture at this command. He blushed very much and responded respectfully to the salutation of Marthena, and with unsuccessfully concealed admiration to that of Dagmar. The rich and ever-swelling tide of his mother's conversation poured over them, and they seated themselves awkwardly in Mrs. Jones's tiny parlor with great discomfort to the piano.

Alec Jones was the first boy that Dagmar had met since her arrival, unless Martin be classified in this way. But Martin's admiration for her was unsatisfactory, Dagmar had long since felt, because it was influenced to the last degree by his policy of educating himself and his sister. "Alec would be a nice boy for Marthena to play around with," said Dagmar to herself, with some dishonesty. "As she won't be able to interest him sufficiently to-day, I'll just make sure of him for her."

Alec Jones was still in college, though something of power and matured capability in his face sug-

gested that he might be beyond college age. He was, as a matter of fact, twenty-two years old and ripe for throwing all of his potentialities into a tremendous love-affair.

Alec was drawn up and sucked in and lost in the vortex of his passion for Dagmar almost as soon as he met her. Not only did she embody for him all his dreams, but the notion that he was protecting her from the evils of a great city fed his desire to shield, which the impotency of his shortness and his mother's desire to make a child of him had always thwarted. Richly affectionate and with a power of unselfishness verging on potentialities of martyrdom, Alec Jones's nature was bottled within his exterior by the inelastic bands of an overwhelming shyness. His mother's only child, and washed from babyhood in her own brand of sentimentality, Alec was no more the spoiled child of tradition than he was the soul warped by selfishness. The protecting care which his mother had always exuberantly lavished upon him had only made him long as exuberantly to squander his own love on another person. And Dagmar, beautiful and exquisite, and oh!—alone in a wicked city, gathered him in, in her careless way, and accepted his heart and soul as so many trifling presents. With a long sigh of content that his unexercised but full-grown faculty of

protecting the weak was to be used at last, Alec settled down to an existence under Dagmar's feet.

The evening passed off, amid Mrs. Jones's cheerful platitudes and Marthena's giggles. Alec's shyness made him devote himself unwontedly and dazedly to Marthena, since he hardly dared look at his Goddess. But it was of Dagmar, to Marthena's astonishment, that he asked permission to call.

A few nights later Dagmar created a sensation at a small dance at Alec's fraternity house. The next day Dagmar's telephone resumed its activities. A Jim, and a Jerry, and a melancholy Mike came into Dagmar's life. She was escorted to theatres and exhibited at parties. A period began in which she never failed to get up in time for luncheon, and incongruous taxicabs drew up in front of Number Nine Pearson Street almost daily.

These manifestations were observed by Marthena with an envious uneasiness. These unreflective and moderately well-tailored youths were to her as romantic as even less reflective but better tailored moving-picture actors would have been. To the side of her which worshipped Dagmar it was curiously fitting that Dagmar should so attract all these boys; but when she compared herself with Dagmar and realized that her opportunities for acting in the

rôle of a lodestar had been equal with Dagmar on the night that they had both met Alec Jones, she was filled with bitterness and self-detestation, which alternated with a jealous hatred of Dagmar. This feeling led her to boast about boys in Reliance who had been extremely devoted to her. And when she saw that Dagmar politely did not believe her, rage overwhelmed her and she would throw her large figure into a chair in which she would hopelessly rock to and fro and dream of the time when she could make a brilliant social appearance with Dagmar as an enraged spectator.

But one night when Dagmar came in she found Marthena radiant. The boy from Elgin, of whom Marthena had boasted, had materialized, and Marthena informed Dagmar that he was coming to take her out. And before the young man took Marthena out to hold her hand and giggle with her in the darkness of a moving-picture house, Dagmar met him and was overcome with a feeling of that nausea for her surroundings which periodically seized her. Nicky was soiled, he chewed gum, he laughed loudly, and he slapped Marthena on the back. "She'll have to give up that sort of person or I can't live with her," said Dagmar to herself, and thought of Alec and Jerry and Mike, any one of whom would be exactly the right sort of a boy for Marthena in

Dagmar's estimation—"after I have fixed her up a little more," added Dagmar.

She decided on Jerry and Alec as trainers for Marthena's first public appearance. It was to be a dinner, and so at half past six the boys came in to the flat bearing, somewhat self-consciously, a cocktail shaker. Jerry shook the vessel importantly, but in Alec's manner there was a hint of vacillation, suggesting that he was fearful of being unable to evade a good-night kiss from his mother.

Dagmar and Marthena were ready to receive them, both carefully dressed in Dagmar's clothes. As they had prepared for the party the great question under discussion had been, whether or not Marthena would be able to exert a social gift which she possessed called: "acting natural." This performance of Marthena's was a manner which she had cultivated at a great deal of pains and was calculated to show that she was utterly at ease in the most cosmopolitan society.

Marthena had two ways of meeting people. The first: acting natural, and the second achieving an embarrassed silence. When she acted natural she was very talkative and interspiced her remarks which were all based on the theory that hyperbole is the only way of conveying an idea, with exclamation-points. Over and under and through her conver-

sation ran a laugh which gave the effect of ripping her sentences out of a garment of mirth which enveloped her. "Dagmar and I eat chocolate peppermints after every meal," would be distinguished between these hilarious chuckles. The bewildered victim of her natural acting sometimes tried to follow her by laughing and making a rejoinder or two, but as he generally found himself in a highly hysterical state over nothing more than the discussion of the weather, he would begin by contenting himself with a smile, and would finally, in exhaustion, unless he were a viciously well-bred young man, finish by looking at nothing at all with a face devoid of any expression.

Marthena never was able to depend upon this social gift of hers. The possibility of its not coming to her assistance at all would often cause her extreme mental anxiety as she prepared to make a social appearance. In a burst of grateful homage to Dagmar she dressed with the gay hope that she would be able to act sufficiently natural to captivate Alec; a feat which Dagmar assured her would be easy.

When four glasses had been awkwardly poured out, Jerry realized with dismay that he had not yet made one funny remark. And as he was considered by himself and Alec to be the wit of his college, he looked quickly up at a frightful reproduction of

Abraham Lincoln in a frock coat and rescued his humorous reputation by observing, with great presence of mind: "Ah, Andrew!"

"Hello, President Jackson," said Alec, laughing hilariously with a feeble attempt to carry on what he considered Jerry's wit.

"My boy," said Jerry solemnly. "Did you think that that was Andrew Jackson? I'm astonished at you. That's Andrew Volstead, the well-known bootlegger!"

"Andrew Volstead," said Marthena in the rippling tones that went with her natural acting. "Why, it is not. That's Abraham Lincoln."

Alec and Jerry looked at each other in consternation. "Are you sure?" Jerry was beginning solemnly, when Marthena, in agonized comprehension, exclaimed: "Oh, it was a joke, and I didn't see it!" Her face contracted, and for a moment they thought she was going to cry. She rushed from the room, and Dagmar quickly followed. Through the fragile door of the kitchenette, the two young men heard the sounds of low, hurried argument.

"What's the difference," Dagmar was saying. "It doesn't amount to a row of pins."

"It was a joke, and I didn't see it; and, oh, I've never done anything so awful in my life! They'll think I'm simply *terrible!* Why am I so stupid?

They knew all along it was Abraham Lincoln and I knew as soon as I said it that they were only fooling. Only it was too late then. . . ."

But the prospect of dining out was too unusual and thrilling for Marthena seriously to consider missing. A few moments later they were whirling merrily along in the taxicab, while Marthena was striving to recover the ground she fancied she had lost by her blunder.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THANK GOD, FASTING, FOR A GOOD MAN'S LOVE

"'All our family are tea-time toilers,' as Grandfather Montgomery used to say," said Dagmar with a laugh. She looked across the tea-table in the restaurant where Will Freeman had brought her, with the smile lingering warmly on her face. Never, she said to herself, had she been so glad to see any one as she was to see Will. She had been astonished to receive a telephone call from him that morning.

"I overhear her at dinner parties," said Will who had been telling Dagmar about her mother: "'Dagmar's such a brave girl, such endurance! Really, it worries me. She used to be quite frivolous!'"

Again Dagmar laughed. "Isn't that ridiculously like mother? I'd love to see her. I'm really not doing a thing but loaf on this job. The whole idea of it is becoming frightfully absurd. I don't seem to be getting anywhere at all."

"You're like your grandfather, Dagmar. He might have been a power in the new country in his day, but he preferred to be just a charming sluggard

instead. And I have always been inclined to think that you were one too."

"I'm not quite as bad as Aunt Etholla, you'll have to admit," said Dagmar. "I do have enough energy to pour tea for my friends, but——"

"That's the reason you ought to marry me," said Will. He looked at her grimly. He had thought himself capable of controlling his emotional impulses rationally; that the well-springs of passion were long since dried up in his nature, and as he said it he realized with a faint but suffering irony that a number of plans which he had laid up for his future, even his old age, were from this moment wrecked beyond remedy. From her childhood Dagmar had diverted him. He had admired and loved her grandfather, and had once seriously considered offering himself to her mother. But the idea of marrying her would certainly never have presented itself to his reasoning powers as a feasible experiment. And yet after a period of six weeks in which he had worried and wondered about her, he found himself sitting opposite her at a tea-table and offering himself to her. Dagmar was regarding him curiously; somewhat surprised, her vanity was in abeyance and she thought to herself with a detachment she seldom achieved: "I've done everything in the world to bring this about, and now that it's come, though I can't believe that it has come,

I wonder why I did it?" For she was the dupe of her own favorite notion that nothing more nor less than her own tremendous wiles and witch-like spells made her irresistible.

"Are you in love with me?" she asked.

Will leaned forward boyishly and caught her wrist. "You make me feel like an old fool, Dagmar. Yes, I'm in love with you." There was a wry silence in which Dagmar looked down at the cloth and felt very young and strange. "Heavens, I must be really grown-up," strayed across her mind, bearing an unrecognized import: the rest of her life had not been as serious as she had thought. "I shall wed Etholla and her melancholy platitudes," said Will, attempting to break the constraint. They both laughed, and Will understood that he had been rejected. He went back to St. Paul that night.

About a week later, on Saturday afternoon, while Dagmar was lying lazily on the couch at Number Nine Pearson Street, she was roused by a smart insistent rapping. Yawning and stretching, she went lazily toward the door and opened it to exclaim:

"Margaret!"

Margaret, as always, exquisitely dressed, if a little too much in the fashion, stood pitched on the toes of her high-heeled and slender slippers, ready to fall into her daughter's arms. "Oh, my child!" gasped

Margaret. "I have come to you. What a ghastly place. My goodness, child, you don't mean you live here? I couldn't believe it when we stopped . . . miles of stairs, darling. I've my baggage downstairs, but it's absurd to think of stopping with you. Darling, all my life I've had ideals about John Patlock——"

"What!" exclaimed Dagmar in bewilderment, dragging her mother across the room, and seating her, with some loss of dignity, under the print of Abraham Lincoln. It seemed to Dagmar that some dreadful catastrophe must have occurred. Margaret went on with no improvement in coherence:

"I wake up in the middle of the night, and, really, hatred sweeps over me so that it's all I can do to keep from taking a hatchet or a poker and just wrecking. . . . The radio has wrecked me and that's no idle jest. Dagmar, John Patlock loves the radio more than he does his own wife. I did try to destroy it. I think I had a right to. He was perfectly furious; my dear, if you'll believe me, he was a brute about it. To move out of the house on account of my extravagance, and then when I got it out of Will, though he was perfectly enraged, my dear, to think I did get it out of him. A proposal, darling, and you had the nerve to refuse him; really, Dagmar, I admire you in a way for it, but under the circumstances it was very

foolish, and to think that the house that my father built is to be dragged away piece by piece exactly as if we were bricklayers or peddlers or auctioneers or something, and he paid three hundred dollars for the radio and then accuses me of extravagance; darling, could you ring for tea?"

Dagmar had attempted to interpose a few comments of her own, but her mother's eloquence would not be stopped. "Perfectly clean, but small after our house; not that I haven't always wanted to sell that absurd house on Summit Avenue, but the taxicab is waiting, and really it looks queer to me. Well, you know the house as well as I do, it's the house Ben Glidden built five years ago out on Summit, John says the up-keep will be less; but of course it makes no difference to me what John Patlock says, I shall never see him again, and I doubt if I shall ever go back to St. Paul again; I have always said it was most provincial and full, my dear, of such stupid people. After your life here in Chicago I'm sure you agree with me."

"But, Margaret," exclaimed Dagmar, "do you mean to say that you've left John?"

"He's been most careless with his money; and, really, I think after the dreadful experience I went through with your father, losing every cent your grandfather left, I think John might have been a

little more considerate. The servants are frightful, and I sincerely hope that John Patlock will have a delightful time with Etholla in charge of the house. Dagmar, what I have suffered from that man with my temperament you will never be even able to conceive, and how I have loved him! My dear, how frightfully odd that lamp-shade is! I think I shall go to Haiti and join my darling, darling boy, he will have to take care of his mother now." But this picture was too much for Margaret Patlock, the forlorn widow, and she flung herself down among the stiff-leather cushions and sobbed heavily.

After perhaps fifteen minutes of this sort of thing Dagmar made out that John Patlock had told his wife that he could not afford to keep up the big house any longer and had accepted an offer from a too rich young man about to be married who was going to wreck it and build a new house on the site which was probably the most desirable one in town. "Stone by stone," said Margaret tragically. "They are going to do it brick by brick. It seems to me unspeakably cheap; and the most frightful article in the paper about it." A quarrel, Dagmar made out, had developed between her mother and John about it in which John had accused Margaret of extravagance and she had retorted by taunting him with the prices he had paid for his three radios. From

this she had gone on to accusing him hysterically of caring more for the radio than he did for her. In a fit of rage she had rushed toward it, and pulled futilely at the wires and succeeded in breaking one expensive globe before John had caught and held her, glaring but helpless. "You brute, you use force," Margaret had done her best to hiss.

"I certainly do," John had replied. "Suffering beeswax! Do you think I'm going to stand here and watch you pull my radio to pieces?" "You do care more for the radio than you do for me," Margaret had sobbed, and she added later to Dagmar with great passion: "I really think he has a phobia about it." She had countered brilliantly by packing her bag, calling a cab, and leaving on the eleven-o'clock train for Chicago. With a characteristic seizure of the dramatic value of any situation in which she could play the heroine, and an equally characteristic practical sense, she had left poor John Patlock, feeling like the brute she had accused him of being, and had arrived to talk over with Dagmar the really serious question of her marriage to Will Freeman.

"Where will you live when you move?" asked Dagmar.

"I told you that we have taken the Ben Glidden house, a perfect box of a place, only three baths.

Really, when we have guests I shall have to issue tickets and have every one standing in line as they do at the public baths. Perfectly ridiculous. Well, it will be a relief to get rid of some of the perfectly ridiculous things in our house; and, darling baby, when are you going to order up some tea? I've been waiting years. Have you a cigarette?"

Dagmar wilted visibly under Margaret's steady volubility. She explained that she would have to make the tea herself, and reluctantly set about doing it. "Nonsense," said Margaret, "my cab is waiting below and I might as well go and register at a hotel."

During the two days of Margaret's visit, before she went triumphantly back to the penitent John Patlock, Dagmar lived with her mother at a small expensive hotel. They had barely arrived in their rooms when the telephone rang, and Dagmar had the excitement of listening to Palomon Bennett's voice. He had come back to Chicago for good, he enthusiastically told her, and was coming to see her that night. Margaret guessed at once from Dagmar's manner after the telephone call what Dagmar's chief reason for refusing Will Freeman had been.

"You're not engaged to this dreadful boy, are you?" she asked Dagmar.

"No-oh," admitted Dagmar reluctantly. Her heart leaped unbearably at the thought and she

ardently wished that she could have defied her mother with an affirmative answer.

"I hope not," said Margaret decidedly. "I never could stand the Bennetts. You know how sensitive I am. And whenever Priscilla Bennett comes into a room where I am I always get perfectly ill. My head throbs frightfully and I nearly always have to leave the party."

"Priscilla is only his uncle's wife!" said Dagmar indignantly.

"Mercy! How can you figure out such frightful things. I feel exactly the same way to Caroline Frisbie and Margaret Lewis, and they are his father's sisters. And as for Dick Bennett!" Margaret shuddered as if all her delicate nervous centres suffered horrors at the thought of Palomon Bennett's unfortunate grandfather. "Heavens!"

"But what have you against Pal," demanded Dagmar.

"Not a thing in the world except that he's dumb."

"Dumb!" Dagmar almost shrieked. "I never heard of anything so perfectly ridiculous. Why, he's the smartest thing I've ever met." A new summit of ridicule was mounted each time that Dagmar and her mother argued. Each time, both were so incredulously astonished at the statements of the other that the echolalia of their previous meetings must

have paled almost to common sense. Margaret raised her brows at Dagmar and from force of habit showed Dagmar her profile. Wrinkling her forehead made her nose appear flawlessly classic. "Well, I see that your intentions at least are serious," she said. "I think that as I have to be a father as well as a mother to you I would better speak to the young man, and find out what his intentions are, before I let him lead my little girl on any more."

There was no hint of sarcasm. Margaret seemed perfectly serious. At that moment Dagmar hated her mother. She was too enraged at the suggestion of an unrequited passion, too alarmed for fear her mother would actually carry out her threat, to perceive the intrinsic idiocy of the conversation. Margaret's anxiety to have her marry Will had led her to extravagant folly in her talk, but she did have enough understanding to know that bringing a question of marriage between Pal and Dagmar into the open would be ruinous to her hopes.

That night Dagmar received her caller in the presence of a fetchingly gowned chaperon who greeted Pal as "You adorable man." Under the deft flattery of Margaret, Pal suffered a swift metamorphosis from the swaggering impudent boy that he generally was to a grave young man of the world who preferred to sit quietly talking of what he imagined were seri-

ous things to a woman who really understood him. He sat back deeply in an armchair and united with Margaret in treating Dagmar as a pretty little child, expected, as Dagmar afterward wrathfully stated, "to prattle by myself among my playthings." After half an hour of it, rage so overcame Dagmar that she telephoned to Alec Jones and left in a kind of beaten triumph to make Alec utterly miserable for the rest of the evening.

The next evening at six o'clock Pal escorted Margaret to the train which was to carry her back to her frantically telegraphing husband. On the way to the station, whence Dagmar had unfilially refused to accompany her mother, Margaret recounted to an utterly convinced Pal the tale of her misunderstood life with her husband, to which was added a diatribe against her unaffectionate daughter.

The afternoon had been spent in a heated argument between mother and daughter in which Dagmar had positively refused to return to St. Paul. Then Margaret had said with true parental firmness, "you will get no more money from home, and you can continue to live in this ridiculous little flat with those two ridiculous people until you are thoroughly tired of it."

"You are speaking of my friends," said Dagmar, more conscious than Margaret (who had laughed)

of the nobility of her words. "And as for money, you seem to be unaware that I am earning a salary!"

"Then try to live on it, my dear," Margaret had suggested. "Try to get your nails manicured on it, and your hair done."

"She'll tire of it very soon," was one of the things that Margaret had confided to Pal. And then, thinking to complete the ruin she had so successfully begun, she told Pal in confidence that the family would probably announce Dagmar's engagement to Will Freeman some time that spring.

CHAPTER NINE

PARTY

Pal's vanity was pricked by the information that Dagmar was to marry Will. It annoyed him to the extent of leading him to the telephone to verify it from Dagmar. She was out, but Marthena, who answered with a profusion of giggles (she was curious to know what this Palomon Bennett could be like) said that she might be in at any time. When Dagmar did come home at eleven o'clock the delightful news greeted her that Mr. Bennett had called four times.

Her wounded feelings were somewhat restored and the weight of uneasiness that his conduct with Margaret had laid upon her was lifted. When he telephoned the next morning she informed him unenthusiastically that she might be able to see him on Sunday afternoon if he could find the time to call upon her then, but the intervening week, she regretted, found her engaged.

"Perhaps your fiancé doesn't care to have attractive young men hanging around," suggested Pal.

"Which fiancé?" asked Dagmar suspiciously. "I have so many."

Pal was more relieved by this answer than he

quite realized, and when Dagmar left the telephone elation was her dominating emotion. Every event of the week (and she filled every night with meaningless engagements) was infiltrated with the intangible presence of Palomon Bennett, and whenever she was alone, she planned the long conversation they would have out of an abundance of crepuscular sentimentality which enshadowed her.

Martin, who had dimly sentimental relations with a dozen women, all of whom he had given unappropriate nicknames, had invited an angular young woman known to him as Wood Spirit and Dryad Girl to come to the flat on Sunday afternoon and meet Dagmar and Marthena, disguised in the invitation as Martin's two kiddies. When Martin told Dagmar about it, it occurred to her that, as a further means of punishing Pal, she would fill the rooms with people and he would enter to find himself in the midst of a party.

She therefore told Marthena that a party was to be arranged all for her sake. Dagmar even told herself that it was to be all for Marthena's sake. And as Marthena's intimate, Ida Orsi, had come to Chicago to study dressmaking, she was invited, as were Alec and Jim and Jerry and Mike, all of the University.

Ida arrived first on that eventful Sunday, and

Marthena entered easily into her favorite recreation of natural acting. By the time that Alec made his bashful entrance, she had worked herself up to such a state that there was no stopping her high spirits. She giggled, she roared, but no vocabulary of laughter could do her justice, and in between her spasms of mirth she ejaculated sentence after sentence, which could only be called unsuccessful in that they failed in their object of fascinating Alec.

Martin arrived next with the Wood Spirit, whose name was Kate McIntosh. She was a sensible young woman in rubbers, whose countenance was decorated with a faint mustache. "I must show you," said Martin to her, "a book of quaint, odd etchings." And they withdrew at once spiritually and sat whispering in a corner for some time. The rest of the party, consisting of Jerry and Jim and Mike who were coming together, and also of Mr. Palomon Bennett, were all fashionably late. Marthena knew, for she could not have lived with Dagmar and remained ignorant of the fact, that the most interesting member of the party to Dagmar would be the last. She was very curious to see what he looked like, and from the moment of the first arrival began to entertain fears of his not arriving, which she whispered to Dagmar at frequent intervals. In this way she assisted Dagmar in

developing, out of a faint feeling of uneasiness, an exaggerated fear which grew into a mental certainty that Pal would not come at all. Dagmar's intense eagerness to see Pal frightened away her hope. She began to talk in nearly as excited a fashion as Marthena, thinking all the time, "the invitation wasn't very definite, perhaps he won't be able to find the place." She strained once at the sound of a footstep and found herself saying to Martin (in what connection she could not imagine) that she feared she was a dreadful source of trouble to him. "Oh, no," Martin was assuring her. "You are a bright spirit," when she was aware that Marthena was beckoning to her from the kitchen between spasms of mirth that she was attempting unsuccessfully to conceal.

She whispered to Dagmar, who had joined her: "That Alec must be crazy or something. He's bobbing up and down like everything every time I come in or go out of the room. What is he doing it for?"

"It's a sort of custom," said Dagmar, as always, feeling at a loss when Marthena asked her to explain social conduct. "It's because he is so anxious to make a good impression, he's trying so desperately to be correct. He——"

She broke off, being unable to explain her appreciation of the fact that Alec was in agony at the idea

of the unconventionality of Dagmar's situation, and was striving in every way to conform to the manners of a society from which, he felt, Dagmar should never be separated. His attempts to be formal in that crowded room were a product of this innate conviction and of the embarrassment which his youth felt in the presence of his adored one. He endured all the tortures that a bashful and sensitive person can endure in the company of his fellows, and felt in a dim way that he was making an ass of himself. But all his faculties were confused and lost in the mesh of the emotion he felt in Dagmar's presence, and he hardly knew clearly what he did, but prayed like a lost soul that he was doing the correct thing.

"What do you mean, custom?" Marthena's laugh rippled in and out of the words. "I never saw any one keep getting out of a chair and back into it again like that."

"When a woman comes into the room a man always rises from his chair," explained Dagmar, annoyed because she had to explain a fact obvious to her.

"Do you mean to tell me that every single time a girl comes into the room a man has to jump out of his chair?" asked Marthena with a rising note of incredulity in her voice.

"Oh, well, people don't carry it to extremes," said Dagmar. "Only a man is not supposed to sit down while a woman is standing."

"What!" shrieked Marthena, and she stifled her laughter which came plunging out in a perfect Vesuvius of naturalness. She shrugged her shoulders and gave Dagmar a look which conveyed the fact that she was not to be taken in any more by Dagmar's pleasantries. She walked back into the sitting-room, and little Alec faithfully got up out of his chair as she entered. She walked to the side of the room, looking out of the corner of her eye at him, watching to see whether he would seat himself or not. Poor Alec looked uncertain, bent his legs as if to sit down, rose to his feet and tried to appear as if he were standing because he preferred to stand. He glanced at Martin, who sat placidly on the couch, undisturbed by any of the niceties of conduct which were causing Alec so much torture.

"Ida," snickered Marthena, "come on out in the kitchen a minute, will you?"

Ida, who was not gifted with the faculty of naturalness, rose uncertainly and followed Marthena. As they left the room, Alec sank once more into his chair; but he was not to be allowed a respite by the implacable Marthena, who had no notion that she

was being cruel. In the kitchen she had conveyed the news to Ida and had asked her assistance in the process. But Ida demurred bashfully, though she was highly amused. "You just go back in the room, then, and sit down, and as soon as he gets good and seated I'll come into the room and sit down, then you get up and go back in the kitchen."

Ida went back into the little sitting-room, and Alec, reddening, glanced about him and started to rise, but Ida, crossing hastily and self-consciously to her chair, did not give him time. She caught Marthena's eye from the kitchen, and snickered. Marthena then entered slowly and stood giggling by Ida's chair. Alec, with the perspiration of agony on his forehead, clung to the arm of his chair pitifully, and breathed a sigh of wonderful relief as he heard the loud approach of his three friends, Jerry and Jim and Mike.

It was only a few moments after this that the youthful Mr. Bennett walked in, evidently under the delusion that he was making a fashionable afternoon call. He not only carried a stick, he wore an air. This air, which was immediately intensified as his eye fell upon the scene of attempted Bohemianism, epitomized one of the most acute cases of world weariness ever displayed. His few months in New York, he secretly considered, with a conviction

which he at once admirably expressed by his actions, had made him into a blasé and bored person who could have little interest in such proceedings as the ones he saw before him.

Marthena's natural acting was quenched by the entrance of this large, actively bored person, who at once dominated the company. He placed himself in the largest chair and addressed his remarks exclusively to Dagmar. He did not encourage any one to speak to him, but when he was directly addressed he rejoined with a positive wisdom which intimated that he was able to give an exhaustive lecture upon the subject if he chose, only he did not choose.

His conversation was largely about the young women of indeterminate character with whom he had been consorting. Alec, listening and watching Dagmar's absorption, was lost in such an abyss of pain that Marthena's attempts to torture him or to draw him out alike passed unobserved. The obsession descended upon him that Dagmar was wasting herself on a man unworthy of her, and Pal's absurd posturings were to him deadly serious betrayal of a sinister character. And Marthena, striving desperately to crawl out from under the blanket of unnaturalness which had enmuffled her on Pal's entrance, began to shriek her sentences until her

courage returned and she began to enjoy the party once more.

Every fifteen minutes Pal would whisper to Dagmar in a voice perfectly audible to the rest: "When does this party break up?"

But the party at last came to an end and Alec began to take an embarrassed leave. Pal, who had been getting more and more wicked under the shocked eyes of Marthena and Alec, now announced in an off-hand manner that he had made up his mind to present Dagmar with a suit of pajamas. Alec, whose hand was on the door-knob, opened his mouth, gasped, and made a hasty retreat.

It was now about nine o'clock, and Pal and Dagmar issued from the building and went in search of a jazz orchestra.

"Marthena has no brains," announced Pal as they sat down in a German restaurant. He was prepared to issue his opinions to Dagmar like little pamphlets. "I should think you would go insane listening to her giggle like that. She's impossible. . . . What do you want to eat?"

He went on commenting happily about the party. How amusing it was that such totally different persons as he and Alec should find the same girl so charming.

"The veneer of sophistication is dropping away,"

remarked Dagmar, "so you find me charming——"

But as they walked through the cold snowy evening, glowing from the exercise of dancing and walking, Pal began to talk about himself in that curtained, shy way which people use when they are approaching that sacred drape that covers their secret aspirations. Pal talked vaguely of a thing which he had greatly desired, but had given up, in a way which conveyed little or nothing to Dagmar, but which moved Pal emotionally to such an extent that, as he said good-by to her, he seized one of her hands and kissed the palm of it impulsively and a little breathlessly.

Dagmar entered the apartment flushed and somewhat excited. It was evident that Marthena was still good for another hour or more of discussion. "I think it went off well, don't you?" she said again and again, and went merrily through incident after incident of the afternoon and evening.

Dagmar, who was as eager to talk of Pal as is a pot of coffee that has reached the boiling-point to go over the top of the container, sat down cross-legged on the couch and animatedly directed the flow of incidents to the ones in which he had figured.

But the mention of his name quenched Marthena's bubblings as effectively as his actual presence had

done that afternoon. She grew restive and reticent under Dagmar's gaily colored narrative of her evening since she had left the party, and it became apparent that she had something to say to Dagmar which had put her at a loss for the proper words.

"I don't think you ought to go out with him," she said at last, to Dagmar's astonishment.

"What do you mean? What in thunder do you mean?" asked Dagmar. "Are you crazy?"

"I don't know exactly how to tell you how I feel about him, but in some ways you're so inexperienced, and a fellow could put so much over on you. . . ." She paused, horribly dashed at Dagmar's stare.

"Pal is just a boy," said Dagmar. "If you have any melodramatic notions that he is going to ruin me or something——"

Marthena began to stammer. "Oh, you've had a lot of experience and you know more than I do about how to act and lots of things, but there are some things about boys that you don't know and that I do know, and this Pal—well, he reminds me of something a boy I knew in Reliance——"

Dagmar, very much incensed at the idea of Marthena's daring to criticise Pal, replied angrily: "The idea of Pal reminding you of anybody in Reliance!"

Tears gathered in Marthena's eyes. "Dagmar, don't be mean. You know I only told you for your

own good. I've been worrying all evening because you were out with him. He's just not the right kind, and I couldn't bear to see anything happen to you."

"You're utterly absurd," said Dagmar, irritated by the tears of Marthena, but still more by the conviction in her tones when she said: "He's not the right kind." This sentence in its very phraseology was enough to lend dignity to Marthena's accusation. "We'd better go to bed, it's more than late," said Dagmar.

They undressed with unusual quickness, their enthusiasms of a few moments before suddenly quelled by their discussion. When the light had been turned out Marthena's voice floated timidly to Dagmar: "Please don't be angry with me, only I know things about boys that you can't even imagine, and I can't bear to think—" she paused at the sound of Dagmar turning her head angrily on the pillow. "You see, Pal is so big, and—well, such a man, that even if he had the best intentions in the world——"

A firm determined knock on the door interrupted her words. "Who on earth can that be," exclaimed Dagmar, and the instantly terrified Marthena whispered imaginatively: "Pal!"

"I've had enough vile insinuations about Pal," Dagmar snapped suddenly as she rose and fumbled

for her dressing-gown. "Who on earth can be coming at this time of night?" she thought.

"You're not going to the door?" said Marthena. "You can't be going to open it. Why, Martin's not here, and it might be something——"

"Oh, hush," said Dagmar crossly. "It's probably a telegram."

But Marthena rushed to the door. "Who's there," she whispered excitedly.

A man's voice answered. "I beg your pardon, but is this where Miss Dagmar Hallowell lives?" The tones were familiar to Dagmar, yet it was impossible that it could be. . . . "Yes, Miss Hallowell is speaking," she answered.

"Dagmar!" She knew. It was Herbie. "Your long-lost brother. . . ." She ran to the door.

"It might be just a plan to get the door open," whispered Marthena, unwilling to relinquish her position, but Dagmar pushed her aside.

"Herbie, I thought you were in Haiti. Just a moment. We've gone to bed and our sitting-room's a bedroom at night, but in a moment I'll let you in."

He came into the room and Marthena almost shrieked at the sight of him, for he was abnormally tall, six and a half feet, though he looked sheepish and his hands hung down awkwardly and seemed too big even for his enormous height. He still had the

touch of distinction that Dagmar had, a grace even in his awkwardness. And his eyes, big and brown and shining, had the winning likable quality of a child's.

They met with many exclamations and the joy of a brother and sister who have romanced about each other's perfections. Herbie was vague as to the cause of his sudden appearance, but it developed that he had no money, and no place to go. It was decided that Herbie could sleep on the floor in Martin's room for that night.

BOOK THREE

THE CAKE OF IDLENESS

CHAPTER ONE

THE GRANDSON OF A SLUGGARD

Marthena, as usual, awoke earlier than Dagmar on the following morning. She heard the loud breathing of Herbie echoing through the flimsy partitions. Prompted by an irresistible curiosity, she glanced at Dagmar who was lost in sleep and then peeped into the room where Herbie lay at his morning slumbers. Martin had gone and Herbie lay on the narrow bed, one long lean arm thrown over his head in the abandoned posture of sleep. He looked particularly youthful and innocent in spite of his mammoth size, and in the flushed radiance of his dreams his large features had a grand aspect, like those of some noble beast. Marthena had the subconscious feeling that if he would only close his mouth he would achieve the harmony of completeness; a feeling that he had not been at all able to give the night before, standing sheepishly upright with his long arms hanging guiltily down as if they had no business to be attached to his person.

She dressed slowly, thinking that he was rather attractive. She was elated because he seemed in some

subtle way to belong to the boys she was accustomed to, while being at the same time undoubtedly attached to Dagmar. It was a faint, obscure link, but at its first appearance it gratified her enormously.

When she was leaving, she awoke Dagmar as was her custom. Dagmar, turning reluctantly in her bed, remembered that Herbie had come the night before and that she must talk to him before she left for work. But when, after half an hour of hesitation, she arose and dressed, she found it impossible to awaken Herbie. She called to him, she shook him, she finally screamed in his ear, but he only shook her off and muttered in his sleep. When hunger drove her out of the house, she went to work, leaving a note for Herbie, and found him, at four o'clock that afternoon, just completing his morning toilet.

As they went out to a restaurant to get his breakfast, he told her that he had been discharged from the Marine Corps for sleeping on duty, not once but three times. As she listened to his story, Dagmar felt such a sinking of the heart as she had never known before. "Have you told Margaret and daddy?" she asked, unconsciously falling into their childhood name for John.

"No," said Herbie, somewhat sheepishly, "John said he washed his hands of me when I went in the Marine Corps. He was damn sore about it. I don't

blame him," he added philosophically and forgivingly. As she looked at Herbie, penniless, incompetent, and sensed at last that he had come to her to be helped because she was his elder and his sister, a sick feeling of responsibility came over her.

"You'll have to get some clothes," said Dagmar, "I have a little money I can let you have, but it's only fifty dollars. You'll have to wire John, I guess. But John is hard up just now, Margaret says, and I really think, Herbie, that you ought to get a job and support yourself."

"That's exactly what I think, too," said Herbie heartily. "I intend to go into some business and earn my own money from now on. You know, I was a fool to join the Marines in the first place, because a man really ought to go to Annapolis if he wants to go in for that stuff seriously." There was no suggestion in his manner that he who at twenty had still been struggling with precollegiate studies would have experienced any academic difficulties in the Naval Training School. The implication was that one of his social position could, of course, become an officer—merely by observing the conventional preliminaries.

The dishonorable discharge of her brother weighed on Dagmar heavily, for she held most of the national ideals, and had lived through the war when the pro-

fession of fighting is always raised to a place of glorification. A secret shame for her brother, which she supposed he shared, kept her from speaking of it any more. As for Herbie, it seemed to him to be a not too unfortunate incident in his life, since it now gave him an opportunity of plunging into the new and untried future lacking in the machine-like regularity to which a number of schools and the United States Marine Corps had endeavored unsuccessfully to make him conform.

"I have a friend who, I think, can get you a job," said Dagmar, thinking of Pal, who had a number of young men working under him. They turned into a white-tabled restaurant at which Herbie shrugged his big shoulders and protested that he couldn't eat in such a hole. "We can't afford a better place," said Dagmar crisply, and hunger and a naturally docile spirit inclined him to follow good-humoredly.

"That's an awful dump your living in, Dag," he said, when a large amount of food had been set before him by a waitress, visibly impressed with his manner. "How'd you ever come to find that school-teacher gink. Never could stand that profesh, myself. By the way, do you think I could write some articles for the magazines about Haiti or the Marine Corps? Still," he reconsidered, for the idea had evidently originated at that moment, "I imagine it would be

quite a lot of work, and I'd probably get just as much money for lecturing about it. What do you think?"

"Oh, Herbie, you couldn't," said Dagmar, appalled, as she thought of every one's finding out that Herbie had been discharged from the Marines. "Listen, dear," she went on, giving her fifty-dollar check to him, "please go and get yourself some clothes and let me find a job for you, and then when you're on your feet and doing splendidly, we'll write and tell Margaret and John about you."

Herbie's brown eyes thanked her, and as she saw the little-boy look in them that had always meant her little brother to her, she could have kissed him, so strongly did pity and love well up in her heart.

She needed all the pity and love she could muster, for Herbie came in late that night without his new clothes and admitting with cheerful shame that the fifty dollars had been lost in a game of chance which as nearly as Dagmar could make out was a combination of pool and craps.

They wired John Patlock who sent a hundred dollars and an imperative summons to Herbie to come at once to St. Paul. But Pal had already promised Herbie a job, and on consideration, which took place over the long-distance telephone between John and Dagmar, it was decided that it would be better for Herbie to keep out of St. Paul, and John finished over

the wire: "Not another cent will he get from me until he shows that he can amount to something."

Pal was manager of a number of young men who went about the city finding out the credit possessed by business firms, for other firms and individuals who wanted to know. Herbie became one of these young men, and on the first morning, smartly outfitted in a new suit, he reported at the astounding hour of eight o'clock.

The next morning he appeared at eight-thirty, the third morning at eleven, and that night Pal called Dagmar up to remonstrate with her. "He's a brother of yours and a nice fellow, Dagmar, but honestly it's bad for office discipline to have a man like that on the job."

Dagmar made a splendid effort the next morning to get Herbie up. He had rented a room on the second floor of the same building, which, like Martin Plunkitt's room, had its own entrance to the public hallway. Her own energy was fast being sapped by the demands that were being made on it, and she had not reported at her own office for three days. She had telephoned Mrs. Jones, who sympathetically urged her not to overtax her strength, though there was a hint in her kind manner that perhaps the work was, after all, too much for Dagmar. After her triumph, the next morning, of getting Herbie to work

only fifteen minutes late, she started out briskly on her own work, stirred by shame at Mrs. Jones's indulgence, to one of her periodic outbursts of energy.

Dagmar floundered in the laziness that engulfed her like a man travelling painfully through deep mud. Coming out of her natural, luxury-loving, easy environment, impelled by some obscure inward desire, involved for her the same struggle that, imaginably, some water animal of prehistoric times might have felt on leaving the sea to dwell on land; the same suffocation engulfed her at times, forcing her back into the deeps of her own lassitude. But, once there, always she was unhappy, chafed at the thought that somewhere within her she sheltered, too well, an entity, splendid but fragile, which might some day die. When this feeling became strong enough she would summon her energy, and begin to travel, like the incorrigible little sciolist that she was, down the first roadway that seemed to open toward any one of the goals she thought she might like to reach.

For days at a time her vague ambition would leave her altogether and she would be walking along an unfamiliar way to an unknown destination. Behind her lay the smooth pleasant surface of everything she had left, and she would think in bewilderment that she had been a fool. And then, inertia seizing her in its vapory negative clasp, she would remain for

days going about the things she had to do in a dreamy way, so that they were recognizable as the deeds they were meant for only in outlines.

But now, stirred by an undercurrent of fear that she would never be able to overcome the family laziness in herself, which was so glaringly pictured in Herbie, and a little frightened for fear it would come to Pal's notice in its more revolting aspects, she was fired with a vital busyness which lasted for almost a week. She was occupied not merely with her own affairs but with those of Marthena and of Herbie. She straightened up their rooms in the morning with a thoroughness of which she was intermittently capable, thinking as she worked how easy and pleasant work really was, once it was embarked upon.

"I'm happy working," said Dagmar to herself one day when she was applying a dust cloth to the long cretonne-draped lamp. Her eyes blurred with tremulous, emotional tears as she thought that if she could spend her life in just ordinary work, with Pal beside her, she would always be happy. "But, if I can't keep it up," she thought pitifully, with a sickening fear of Pal's scorn—"if I can't keep it up! . . ."

CHAPTER TWO

ALEC

"It's just what I expected," groaned Will Freeman. "One of the worst I've ever seen." He sat gloomily beside Dagmar on an uncompromising bench in the Chicago Art Institute, staring sardonically at an exhibition of pictures by a young woman distantly related to him. "Now, she'll ask me what I think of it and I shall either have to lie, or spend the rest of my life in the midst of a family feud! Dagmar, why didn't you restrain me from coming to this thing?"

Dagmar sat admiring a pair of fawn-colored French gloves that she had purchased that morning and thinking of Pal. The gloves smelled faintly of wet leather through the perfume that had been applied to them, for the day outside was half-heartedly rainy. She thought little of what Will was saying, but listened with an amiable appearance of interest.

"I might have known exactly the sort of pictures that Amelia would paint," went on Will, "after reading an interview with her in one of the art magazines. There was a picture showing Amelia in a walking costume and with her arms clasped around

the neck of a large St. Bernard dog. 'I love the open country,' she was saying, 'I hate the town!' And from babyhood Amelia has refused to come even to St. Paul on the ground that it was rural and because she cannot exist, she says, in any town smaller than London."

Dagmar stifled a small yawn. "I see that you feel yourself hopelessly incarcerated in my conversation," said Will. "Perhaps you'd like to hear some news of your family?"

"I don't mind," said Dagmar.

Will described Margaret and John in their new home, and shook his head over John Patlock. "He's lost a lot of money, and it worries me. Margaret goes on just the same, and she doesn't seem to realize the seriousness of the situation." There was a pause.

"You ought to marry me, Dagmar," said Will. "I'm perfectly disinterested about it. A man my age can be, you know." He thought that he really was.

"I don't know," said Dagmar vaguely. "I like you a lot, but I don't think it would do."

"If you can't marry me, for Heaven's sake marry somebody that can take care of you. I never have seen such a preposterous situation as the one that you are in. I always thought Margaret had a grain or two of common sense somewhere under that

idiotic youth of hers, but now I know I was wrong. She is a confirmed old rake with no conscience, and——"

"She wants me to marry you, though," said Dagmar smiling.

"Of course she does, and merely because she thinks the marriage would have a certain chic in the eyes of St. Paul."

The next day they rode together through the park in the late afternoon, and Dagmar, as she realized that he was leaving, felt a sudden nostalgia. A swift dream of what marriage with Will would mean swept over her. A welcome from the town of approving enthusiasm, hundreds of parties, new clothes and more new clothes, and herself as the heroine of twenty important social occasions; a honeymoon abroad, with social triumphs in the drawing-rooms of Rome and Paris, and the necessity of rising in the morning forever gone from her conscience, a worry that harassed her unceasingly, though never to the point of making her erase it.

They crossed a street and were cantering along side by side in a newly widened path. On the right a green bank was dotted with picnickers from the Italian district, and countless sweethearts were wandering hand in hand on all sides.

"That looks like your brother," said Will, and

pointed to a tall young man who had his hand on the arm of a stout girl on the path not six feet away.

Dagmar looked and saw that it was Herbie, walking with—of all people, Marthena. He looked confused at Dagmar's surprised stare, and blushed as he lifted his hat. Dagmar rather haltingly explained that Herbie had left the Marine Corps, and Will was silent; for Herbie had become such a skeleton in the family closet that people no longer mentioned him to Dagmar, but, from the way Will compressed his lips and looked ahead of him, it was evident that this latest revelation had shocked and upset him.

When Dagmar got back to the flat after dining and going to the train with Will, she found Marthena alone, sitting on the bed in her night-dress, white and scared. "The most terrible thing has happened!"

"To Herbie?" Dagmar was immediately plunged into a sea of worried expectancy.

"No"—even in the midst of her terror, and it was evident that Marthena was thoroughly frightened, she could give the mention of Herbie's name a passing simper, for had not Dagmar seen her walking in the park with him? "It's that Pal Bennett; honestly, Dagmar, I told you that he wasn't to be trust——"

"But what happened to him?" asked Dagmar impatiently.

"Why, he rushed right up here and knocked on the door and just insisted on coming in. Well!" She paused, but Dagmar still preserved the attitude of expectant listening. Marthena, less sure of the melodrama, began to rely on repetition. "Well, he came right up to the door and knocked, and I was in bed, and I rushed to the door and said, 'Who's there?' and he said, 'Is Dagmar there?' And I said, 'No, of course not,' and don't you think that was funny?"

"What did he want," asked Dagmar.

"That," said Marthena, stressing a heavy meaning, "is what I wonder. Well, I told him you weren't here, and he said that he would come in and wait, and I was mighty glad the door was locked—why, I was afraid he was going to break the door right down!"

"Well, what happened," asked Dagmar.

"Why, that happened. Imagine him coming up here and . . ." Marthena related the incident again.

Dagmar went to bed, losing the incident in a mass of bored amusement, which was unmixed with anger because she did not realize the enormity of Marthena's imaginary concept of Pal. She thought that Marthena was insinuating that Pal was attempting to have a secret affair with Marthena, and dismissed the matter from her mind in the greater curiosity

which she felt on the incident of seeing Herbie and Marthena in the park together. "We were just walking, Dagmar," Marthena had said with her customary decoration of a giggle. And Dagmar, curiously wondering how it had happened, resolved to question Herbie.

But she did not see him again until the next afternoon, which was on a Saturday, when she found him waiting cheerfully for her at the door of her office when she came out, with the information that he had been fired. "No chance of rising there, anyway," he said. "Pal has the only good job in the place, except for a lot of old fossils, and it's easy to see that as soon as one of them croaks, Pal will get that place, too."

Dagmar drew a long breath and wondered dismally what horrible things Pal was thinking of her brother. "I've got a really good job, now, though," went on Herbie optimistically. "Advertising. That's where the real money is. I'm going to start Monday on the Chicago *Tribune*, soliciting advertising. Some of those birds make two hundred a week. That's better, I guess, than the little measly twenty-five I've been getting."

"Two hundred a week!" said Dagmar incredulously. "Do they start you out at that?"

"Oh, I don't get any salary," explained Herbie happily. "I work on commission. That's the best

way. From now on, Dagmar, just watch your brother. I have my own hours, too."

Dagmar spent the afternoon in various small errands for Herbie. She wired John Patlock for fifty dollars that Herbie might pay his room-rent, well knowing that the generous and easy-going John would not question her about it.

And then, with the strange mystic feeling in her breast like the mood of an impending thunder-storm moaning faintly beyond a blue lake shrouded in twilight, she went to meet Alec Jones who entered the melancholy atmosphere of her spirit, and clumsily endeavored to comfort her with the inept phrases of conventional sympathy.

"Dagmar, if I could just do something to help you," he said in his yearning, hesitating way. They were dining together, and when they were seated she noticed, as she often had before, that at table with his little legs hanging under the cloth, the splendid lines of his handsome head rising above the shoulders that were too broad for his body, Alec was at his best. Here, with the table before him, like a small fortress, he gained a dignity, which in the later years of his life he would, perhaps, have at all times.

"Some day, Alec, you'll amount to something," said Dagmar parenthetically, for she had, of course,

no notion of switching the conversation away from herself.

"Oh, Dagmar!" exclaimed Alec, beside himself with the ecstatic sentimentality of the moment. "Do you really think so? If you believed in me . . . you're so wonderful, if you thought I could——"

"I'm not wonderful," said Dagmar, seizing the first opportunity to come back to herself with her usual cavalier manner in dealing with Alec. "Just now, I'm a completely helpless, somewhat frightened girl—" a sense of lyrical thrilling beauty surrounded her as she detached this image of Dagmar from herself and almost tearfully regarded it with the completely sympathetic Alec.

"I know," and rose in that instant to the highest pinnacle his manhood had yet reached. It was as if hundreds of angelic girl faces seen dimly through the mists of his mother's most nonsensical patter were rising toward him and slowly focussing in the radiant face of the girl opposite him. He breathed deeply, and, holding her gaze with a blushing steadfast earnestness, began to talk rapidly. "Dagmar, if I could just do something to help you, I believe I'd be willing to give my life. You think I'm just talking, but I'm not, really, and I want to do something for you a lot. Something to help you out,

and—and really it would make me happy just to help you. And Dagmar if you ever liked me enough to let me——"

"I do like you, Alec," said Dagmar uncomfortably, and added hastily, "only I care a lot about somebody else, you know, and . . ." her sentence died and she looked down miserably at the cloth, for Alec's face had worked suddenly into the terrific heart-broken contortions of childhood.

"I know, Dagmar," his words attempted to cling desperately to rationality, but his tones were like an animal in pain. "I know, Dagmar, I never thought you could care about me, and of course I know that you don't care about me, and that wasn't what I meant at all, because I know, Dagmar." The tears had come out of his eyes and his voice had gone, but Dagmar's eyes were lowered, and awkward sentences rose to her lips and came half-way out. . . . "Think you're splendid." "I know, Dagmar," repeated Alec idiotically. "I never thought for a minute that you could care for me in that way. I wouldn't expect it of you. Why, I'm not half——"

"You have a bad inferiority complex, Alec," said Dagmar, striving for a lighter tone, and Alec giggled hysterically.

"I guess that's it," he said. "Dagmar, you don't

understand, it's just that I'd like to do something for you——"

"You have done a lot for me, Alec," said Dagmar, because the sentence fitted in well and seemed to thicken the surface of things back to decency.

"But there is one thing that I've thought of," said Alec. "But it seems so stupid to mention it. You never eat in cafeterias, do you?"

"Oh, yes, I do," Dagmar reassured him with a facial gesture meant to show the democratic spirit of Dagmar Hallowell.

"Well, I thought, you know—I thought—well, you know you said you hadn't much money and Herbie being out of a job—well—" he paused, inhaled deeply as if for a dive into cold water; "lots of the fellows earn their meals by cleaning off the tables in cafeterias; and, honestly, you can get dandy meals——"

"Herbie wouldn't," said Dagmar.

"Oh, I know that. I know Herbie wouldn't, but I could do it for a couple of hours every day when I have nothing else to do, and you see I get all my meals at home, and then, you see, you get a sort of free ticket, and you or Herbie could go in and eat off of this ticket whenever you wanted to—honestly, Dagmar, it would save you a lot of money——"

"Alec," said Dagmar, "how awfully sweet of you!"

"Then you will," said Alec, his hazel eyes full of emotion, his young, eager face brimming over with the gratified feeling of protection he so earnestly longed to squander passionately on Dagmar.

"Alec, I don't need it; but thank you just as much."

"I know how you feel, you think you shouldn't accept that much from me; but I'd like to give you everything I've got, Dagmar. If I only had something to give——"

The argument went on for a long time. Alec, always too well protected by his mother, inspired from childhood with the ideal of taking care of somebody else, and thwarted always because he was the small one, he was the dependent one, and with a definite gift for self-sacrifice, had come now to a great resolution, all the more potent because to him it was unconscious; he was a useless, inferior creature, but in some way he would sacrifice himself for the glorious being that was Dagmar.

"I'm awfully glad about you and Pal," he said when he was leaving her at the door. "Really, I am. I think he's a fine chap. And of course he'll do everything for you. But, Dagmar, if there is ever anything that I can do, will you let me know?"

So have all rejected lovers of fiction taken leave of their mistresses. This familiar quality appealed

sentimentally to Dagmar who responded suitably. The cliché, necessarily heartless, though appearing its opposite, comforted Alec as only an image can comfort, and he went away with the sad, satisfied feeling of having lived through moments of great importance.

"Herbie must be up there waiting for me," she thought as she heard the sound of his low-pitched but boisterous laugh from a long distance down the hall.

The noise increased as she got nearer and she could hear Marthena's giggle. Martin was out, and when Dagmar appeared she discovered that the uproar had come from nothing more than a social diversion of Marthena's, called "Making Fudge," which consisted of putting together some edible materials suitably mixed in a pan and then getting a young man to stir it while it cooked. Throwing water and attempting to force a hot spoon down the throat of her victim was part of the game, which Herbie seemed to be enjoying hugely and Marthena let it appear a little too plainly that she considered Dagmar's interruption due to spite.

While they ate the fudge, Martin came in, and sat dreamily thinking of a school-teacher from Des Moines that he had named "Child of the West" and absent-mindedly trying to hold Dagmar's hand.

"I think you boys ought to bring us our breakfasts in bed," said Marthena, with a little laughing wiggle and a giggling pout.

"We surely will," said Herbie gallantly. "What do you want? Bacon and eggs, buckwheat cakes?"

"Wouldn't that be just terrible?" shrieked Marthena. "Isn't he awful?"

"An awful liar," said Dagmar. "He'd never be up in time."

"You wait and see," said Herbie. "I'll surprise you two girls in bed, and arrive like the original chef of the piece with a tray or two of good solid food."

"In bed," screamed Marthena, with a remnant of the Victorian tradition that ladies never go to bed. "How perfectly awful!" Never had she been more natural. Her flushed cheeks proclaimed the consciousness that she knew she was being amusing, and in the face of Herbie there was no denial of it. He took an elaborate farewell of her in the hall and went down on the first floor to his room. Dagmar woke the next morning to the pleased consciousness that it was Sunday and that she could lie in bed without suffering any sort of qualms. She at once resumed her delicious doze, from which she was unexpectedly roused by a tremendous thumping on the front door.

"Oh, dear, dear," Marthena was saying, "who do you suppose it can be?"

"I've no idea," muttered Dagmar crossly. "For Heaven's sake stop that noise and give us a chance to get to the door."

"Sleepyheads, sleepyheads," called the voice of Herbie. "Here's your breakfast." She threw open the door. There stood Herbie, looking more handsome and immaculate than she had ever seen him, with a huge tray full of food. What tremendous force had been in operation to get him out of bed that morning Dagmar never positively knew. But there he incredibly stood, having arisen of his own volition for the first time on record.

"Of all things!" said Dagmar. "Good Heavens, we're not even dressed! It's only about *dawn!*"

"Look at the way he found me, look at the way he found me," gibbered Marthena, dancing about. "Isn't it terrible?"

Dagmar looked at the way he had found Marthena and gasped. Her hair, released from the iron wires that had bound it all night, hung about her shoulders in that ingenuous disorder in which Mary Pickford is often found on the screen. A brand-new and lacy negligée of an exquisite pink brought out admirably the very natural, if a trifle formal-looking pink and white of Marthena's well powdered and rouged coun-

tenance. "I've never been in such a situation before in my whole life," bubbled Marthena in the highest possible state of human delight. "I'm so embarrassed I don't know what do do. Go away, you terrible, terrible boy, until I can get dressed!"

CHAPTER THREE

QUARREL

"She is sure I have sinister designs on her," said Pal, "and she repulsed me with loathing and repugnance, and not too much politeness."

He was walking with Dagmar, and recounting, with some amusement, the episode that had caused Marthena such alarm. A softness in the air hinted that perhaps spring might soon be coming. "But it's still a little cold," said Dagmar.

"Better fasten up your coat; here, let me fasten it." They stopped while he fussed with her collar. Up and down the deserted street, vagrant lights only intensified its essential darkness—a way of manifold shadows. Pal laughed.

"What you laughing at," demanded Dagmar.

He explained with a certain uncharacteristic hesitancy that attempted to hide a tenderness that had crept into his tone. "The idea occurred to me that I might kiss you after I buttoned your coat, and then I wondered what would happen if I did. In which classic manner would you act? 'How dare you, sir?' or, 'Oh, Pal, this is so sudden,' and while I was think-

ing that I couldn't imagine you acting either way, it suddenly occurred to me that I was a conceited ass." The silence that followed was shattered with electric sparks like the bursting of a meteor. They talked but desultorily that night, and ten-thirty brought their lagging footsteps back to the base of the endless stretch of stairs. "Aren't they awful!" sighed Dagmar, and Pal swept her into his arms and carried her up the last flight. The long, slow, pulsating march upward, eternal in the happening but brief the moment it was ended, stopped abruptly as Pal set her on her feet with a very untender thud and asked her for a glass of water. He brushed his hands across his eyes as if to sweep the emotion from his face, and Dagmar opened the door cautiously to see if Marthena had yet made their home into a bedroom.

"She's gone to bed," said Dagmar, "I'll have to bring the water out." As she passed through the room, Marthena muttered and seemed to cry softly in her sleep. She closed the door and stood with one hand on the knob, giving the glass to Pal with the other.

He drank slowly and handed the glass back to Dagmar, who flicked the remaining drops of water in his face. "If you do that again, I'll kiss you," said Pal, and Dagmar did it again and retreated inside the door.

An intense moodiness seemed to possess Marthena the next day. She looked at Dagmar several times with heavy reproachful eyes, and sighed portentously.

"What is the matter?" snapped Dagmar for the third time.

Marthena shook herself and exclaimed at last: "Dagmar, why will you persist in pretending that Pal was not in this apartment last night after I went to bed!"

Dagmar looked at her with puzzled, frowning brows. "What do you mean? I haven't pretended anything of the sort. But, as a matter of fact, he wasn't."

Marthena compressed her lips, blinked, and snorted. "Well, you needn't lie about it. You thought I was asleep, but I distinctly saw him in this very room, sitting on the bed."

"You must be crazy," retorted Dagmar, "and please don't tell me that I lie, because I don't. He was not in the room."

The quarrel developed alarmingly. Marthena, hearing Pal's voice in her sleep had probably visualized him so clearly that she was convinced that she had seen him. Dagmar, unable to understand why Marthena should make such an assertion, passed from amazement to anger, and finally said: "Well,

call up Pal if you don't believe me, and he'll tell you."

"That's too easy! Of course, he'd stick up for you!"

"You can apologize for that at once, or I'll never speak to you again!" said Dagmar heatedly.

Marthena was shaken, a little frightened by Dagmar's vehemence. "I didn't mean a thing, Dagmar, only I did see him, honestly I did!" She began to whimper, and sat ungracefully down to regard Dagmar with an unmoving, because it was unbeautiful, pathos.

Dagmar was already tending to dismiss the scene as unimportant. Her self-esteem, which had never ceased to regard Marthena snobbishly, demanded that Marthena abase herself a little more, and so she replied coldly: "This is my last word to you, until you apologize for saying that I lied."

"I'll never say that something I saw with my own eyes wasn't true." Perhaps she hoped for one of those long bickering evenings that seem to contain an ingredient of spice for some women, but Dagmar's mouth had closed. Her tirade ended in tears.

Marthena had a kind of love for Dagmar, inspired by the feeling of inferiority she felt combined with the gratitude that Dagmar's association with her sporadically roused. Her emotions were perhaps

closer akin to hate, for, while the combination of qualities which Dagmar represented to her were worshipped, the living Dagmar inspired much more of envy and jealousy than she did of anything else.

Dagmar, harassed as she was by the problem of Herbie, gave the affair no more importance than it merited, except that she childishly held to her vow not to speak to Marthena. It saved her many wearisome hours of listening to Marthena's tiring anecdotes. When she had anything to say to Marthena she addressed her disdainful remarks to a picture of Herbie at the age of twelve, which hung on the wall.

Marthena brooded and seemed to sicken under Dagmar's cruelty. She cried herself to sleep each night, and one day was unable to attend her filing duties in the mail-order house where she worked.

"You know, Herbert, it's perfectly silly of your friend Marthena to take on so about it," said Dagmar to the picture. "All she has to do to restore harmony to our beloved home is to apologize for calling your sister a liar."

But Marthena would not retract. Martin, thinking that he was taking a very impartial attitude, refused to deliver an opinion, and Herbie, when he heard of it grinned his wide, jeering grin, like an urchin amused at a practical joke. His position on

the *Tribune* had not been as easy as it had looked. While his hours were his own, he found that those between three and six in the afternoon were not the best time to approach prospective customers, and he earned, in the five days that he worked, three dollars and nineteen cents. Then, because he needed money and also a new suit of clothes, he took what he admitted was a temporary position on the elevated railroad as a guard. His duties consisted of opening and shutting doors at the stations and calling in loud, resounding tones the names of the streets where the cars stopped.

"Course I couldn't do this in St. Paul," Dagmar overheard him explaining to Marthena, "because of my social position."

"And, also, possibly, because there are no elevated railroads in St. Paul," said Dagmar.

Herbie ignored this and continued to Marthena: "You see, it furnishes me with a uniform, and just now I'm hard up and I can't afford to buy too many clothes. Working's awfully hard on a man's clothes, you know. I don't have to start work until eleven in the morning, and in the evening—I got to work nights, you know—there won't be many people, and I can probably read, or rest, or do anything I like."

"Will you give me a free ride?" asked Marthena with three not clearly detached laughs.

Herbie frowned importantly. "Well, I'll see what I can do about passes. You got to come and talk to me when I get bored."

"You'll have to learn the names of all the stations," said Dagmar, who, on account of her feud with Marthena, to whom Herbie was addressing most of his remarks, felt somewhat irritated.

"No, I don't," said Herbie. "I just make 'em up. If I can't think what the next station is I'll just say H-a—am Sand-wich," here Herbie bellowed at the top of his voice, "and let it go at that."

CHAPTER FOUR

DISASTER

Pal, who had caused the trouble between Marthena and Dagmar, had been out of town for two weeks, and Dagmar had not written him about it. So, on an evening of early spring after they had dined together, Dagmar, who had almost begun to doubt her own remembrance in the face of Marthena's dogged holding to her belief, recounted the story to him and found a relief from the strain of it in his jesting comments. They walked along savoring the fragrant night and their merry tender friendship which had been the ardent prelude to their love-affair.

As Dagmar put out her hand to him to wish him good night he stood over her with a frightened menace. "Are you prepared for the doom that is about to descend?"

Dagmar resorted to a stiff conventionality. "I don't know what you mean," she said with formal coldness, and endeavored to remove her hand from his clasp.

"Dagmar"—his eyes brimmed with the thin layer of laughter that overlaid his deeper emotions—"you're a little liar. I'll count ten before you are

delivered to your fate and give you time to get ready."

He began to count deliberately, holding her firmly by the shoulders, while she, with head haughtily lifted, as if she were resenting an insult, thought: "He won't dare, he surely won't dare. What shall I do if he does?" for a faintness was undermining her limbs. Pal finished his ten counts and kissed her.

She stared at him with big amazed eyes, aware that everything was changed by that kiss. He laughed hysterically, trying to put on his bravado, like a man struggling into an overcoat, but for him too externals had faded away, leaving only Dagmar and himself, Dagmar and Palomon. And they kissed again, drawn together by a compelling need.

Suddenly Marthena opened the door, ugly and unkempt, in an uncouth garment she called a kimono. "Dagmar!" she gasped, as if all the fears she had ever nourished had sprung into being before her outraged eyes. She burst into tears and closed the door abruptly. They could hear her cross the room heavily and fling herself into bed with loud, horrible, agonized sobs.

The astonishment of Dagmar and Pal melted back again into the ecstatic happiness she had interrupted with the slight indulgent smile that gods award ridiculous mortals. "I'll have to go to her," said

Dagmar at last, as the sobs continued. "We've been having a childish quarrel and she can't understand about anything."

"Let me wait, sweetheart," he begged. "Dagmar, I've so many things to tell you."

"You can't to-night," said Dagmar. "Oh, wouldn't everything be absurd if it weren't so sweet; but I'll tell you before I go in that I love you—and——"

"I love you, too, more than a million dreams, Dagmar; I can't say good night——"

Dagmar returned to Marthena with the dream feeling of one who walks upon water. Amid disconnected and extravagant sensations she seemed to restore herself to the room. Extraneous objects, enlivened for an instant in the flood of an impalpable radiance, had taken on an exotic significance, and it was as if a different Dagmar Hallowell were walking into an unfamiliar room.

"I'm sorry I've made you unhappy," said Dagmar. "It was rotten of me!" The unimportance of quarrelling struck her, and the trouble with Marthena seemed like a harmless microbe doomed to die in the electric brilliance of Dagmar's joy.

"Dagmar!"—Marthena rose to her feet from the bed, and walked like a person in physical agony to throw herself on Dagmar—"you don't know—you don't understand. You think I'm mad at you—or

jealous or—but it's something far, far worse!" For inside this door where happiness seemed to be imprisoned there was another and very different emotion crouching to destroy it. To Marthena this thing had been stalking about for days, filling the quiet atmosphere with a rampant agony.

And now an overpowering longing for confession shook her whole being, and she sobbed: "Dagmar, you've got to know for your own good—I wanted to keep it from you—but now, I've seen this with Pal——!"

It was as if Dagmar had been set upon her feet with a jolt. The insinuation in Marthena's voice inflamed her. "What do you mean—you saw—this—with Pal?"

Marthena's body shook with sobs. "Don't be angry—don't be angry, Dagmar. It's just that you're so inexperienced. You don't understand!" She stopped. She had reached a point where she had forgotten everything else but her desire to relieve her mind of its terrible burden. But she was afraid, even while she longed to say the words.

"Stop crying right away and tell me what on earth you're talking about."

Marthena gulped and tried to control her hysteria. "Your brother Herbie, that you think is so wonderful, has got me in trouble," she said in a voice strained

from repressed sobs. She sobbed loudly and ended defiantly, "if you want to know!"

"In trouble!" Unbelieving comprehension was stealing over Dagmar. "What do you mean?"

Marthena, a little frightened now that she had got out the information, suddenly stopped crying. "You know what I mean, all right, she said sullenly. "He's gone and taken advantage of me."

"Why, you horrible girl," said Dagmar, "are you trying to tell me—" she paused.

"You're no better than I am," said Marthena, "hugging that Pal out there in the hall."

"Good God, Marthena, don't you ever dare mention Pal to me again. You're not fit to say his name. I don't know what on earth to think. . . ."

"You're not fit to say his name!" The phrase of melodrama lodged itself naturally in Dagmar's mind, and became the key-note of her attitude toward Marthena. She attained one more height in her mental dominance of Marthena, and the miserable girl cowered before Dagmar's utter mastery of the situation.

The army of the righteous, whose assistance Dagmar hitherto had not attempted to command, now stood massed at Dagmar's back as if in military order, with guns lifted ready to fire on the abject Marthena.

No touch of sympathy came to humanize Dagmar or to aid Marthena. The girls were, as always, utterly at cross purposes, showing their worst sides to each other.

Cowering, crying, utterly abased between sobs and incoherent outbursts, Marthena tried to make Dagmar understand.

"Put yourself in my place," said Marthena. "Think, Dagmar. Think like this: 'I'm Marthena, and I'm living in a little place like Reliance,' and think, say to yourself: 'I'm coming down the stairs with their old worn rag carpet on them, and I'm wearing a floppy hat.' Can't you think it, Dagmar? Think, 'I'm Marthena! I feel beautiful in this hat and I'm wrong about not being beautiful, and I'm going out to meet Dagmar. Dagmar doesn't exist yet; she's something gracious and kindly and wonderful, that's going to teach me. And she's big, and you can't imagine her because she's like God.

"'She's like God, but as soon as I see her on the bridge, she's more wonderful than I imagined, but my floppy hat is all wrong. And everything with me is wrong, and I knew it from that first minute. But still I keep on trying and thinking, and trying and thinking, but she knocks me down whenever I try to carry out my thoughts. She doesn't help me

at all. She just knocks me down.'" Marthena collapsed in hysterical sobs while Dagmar looked at her coldly.

Marthena regained control of herself to say: "Can't you see me? Can't you understand? I want to be somebody! I want to be something! I've got to be somebody. And you promised to help me!"

"Do you mean to insinuate that I'm to blame for this——"

Marthena choked. "You're not to blame! No, no, Dagmar, I don't mean that. Only you're so cold and hard. You won't understand. Can't you just try and understand a little? I wanted to have people like me, and they wouldn't. They don't like my looks. They can't even give me a chance just because I'm not pretty— And so, I don't know—I just thought boys would like me better—I wanted Herbie to like me—and well——"

"That's a fine way to go about it," said Dagmar.

"Herbie does like me, anyway. It's Herbie's fault. It's your own brother, and you ought to blame him just as much as me——"

"I do blame him," said Dagmar, "but I blame you too."

"No, you don't blame me, you think I'm a bad girl, and Herbie's——"

"Herbie's just a child——"

This went on, with both girls getting more nervously exhausted every moment, until three in the morning, when Herbie came in.

He admitted that all Marthena had said was true, and cried shamefully and grotesquely. And when Dagmar asked him how such a thing could have happened, he muttered some vague sentiments about his manhood, and added that he hated Marthena.

That dreadful day passed in a long repetition of the various opinions of Dagmar, Marthena, Herbie, and Martin Plunkitt—a council which developed nothing but this: Martin and Marthena thought there should be a marriage; Dagmar and her brother thought there should not be. Herbie's flaccid mouth drooped more and more, his long arms hung listlessly at his sides, his big brown eyes stared meaninglessly into space, and he fell asleep while the battle raged around him.

The superficial mannerisms of Martin Plunkitt were all swept away by the revelation. The utterance of one suitable phrase was beyond him, and Dagmar discerned in the naked suffering that was revealed in his haggard eyes that same quality which she had recognized and described in John Patlock as goodness. His upward strivings, absurd because they were unsuccessful, had a fundamental

basis on what is conventionally called honor, and he had always idealized his sister and dreamed of her as rising in the world beside him. He was helpless and in no way attempted to come forward in the rôle of the avenging brother. In the crisis, Dagmar emerged as the strongest person there, because of her indomitable decision that Herbie should not marry Marthena.

Marthena employed all the resources of the hypochondriac, all those of the sentimentalist, but in Dagmar she found a hard, resistless determination: Herbie was under age and unreliable, he could not support himself, much less Marthena and a child. Marriage would mean more children and a life of endless squalor for both of them. Marthena who had sprung from a life of just such squalor could not shudder with Dagmar at the prospect of it. Dagmar brutally stated that Herbie had an aversion to Marthena, and Marthena, with a slight return of her preening, contradicted it, and asserted in the presence of the sleeping Herbie that he loved her.

Pal called up three times, but Dagmar could not bear to see him. It seemed that the world she had lived in with him was gone. She had been fighting ceaselessly, sleeplessly and would fight endlessly for her young brother and a vague dead thing called the family honor.

"Herbie is the one to decide, I think," said Martin Plunkitt at one time and went over and shook him. They could not wake him, and he slept on in a horrible torpor that was like glue resuming its surface after a pin prick.

"Herbie will do whatever I say," said Dagmar with a slight smile, and Martin knew with a sinking heart that she was right.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BRILLIANT IDEA

In all that hysterical conflict the four were secretly agreed on one point: Margaret and John Patlock must not be called in. If the Plunkitts had been shrewd adventurers they might, perhaps, have used the club of publicity on the high-handed Dagmar. Both were secretly terrified by the vision of Margaret, which intermittently haunted them, as they had seen her for a few moments, standing disdainfully in the tiny flat, while she administered a flattery-covered snubbing to them in an easy and patronizing way of which she was pleasantly mistress. Dagmar had the feeling that Margaret would only make matters worse by a precipitous interference. And she also had a dread (incorrect and founded on a mistrust of her mother she had lately developed) that Margaret would gossip of it afterward. A knowledge of which she was only obscurely conscious that John Patlock would support Marthena's case, made her anxious to settle the affair by herself. As for Herbie, he was shamefully beaten and would have been roused from the lethargy which enveloped him only to animosity if the question of his

mother's being informed had been brought up. For this reason all four of them avoided the names of John and Margaret Patlock.

In the afternoon Martin Plunkitt went to his school. Herbie slept on, and Marthena, sobbing and calling out frenzied arguments from time to time, finally fell into an exhausted slumber. . . . Dagmar opened a letter which the postman had delivered that morning in an envelope marked with the name of the School Lover's League.

"My dear Miss Hallowell," Mrs. Jones had written, "while I feel that your services have been, in many ways, invaluable to our work, it has seemed to me for some time that you were overtaxing your strength, and that is something which I can ask of no one. It is evident that the tasks which I have called upon our girls to perform have been too much for your delicate health. Now, the uncertain hours and the grinding labor requires (I might almost say demands) that I employ girls only of robust health. For that reason it is my duty to inform you that for the present at least I think it the better part of wisdom to sever your connection with the School Lover's League. I wish to thank you personally for all you have done; for your splendid work in the stockyards as well as your splendid co-operation with the ideals and aims of our organization. It

has all been deeply appreciated. In the hope that at some future time your health will permit you to resume work among us, I remain,

Your sincere friend,

NELLA JONES,

President of the Chicago School Lover's League.

The paper drifted to the floor and was fluttered by the first vagrant breeze of spring, unheeded by Dagmar. It was an ironic reminder that she, Dagmar Hallowell, was linked to Herbie, as the servant of the inexorable and passive God whose silent indolent laughter seemed to echo through the room at the sight of his huge enchained victim. "I'm like Herbie, I'm like Etholla; I'm lazy," gasped Dagmar's inner struggling consciousness. She felt herself degraded to depths lower than those in which Herbie dwelt because of the precious inner thing that was Dagmar and which she felt that she was perversely killing.

Like a knife, glancing obliquely just off the heart, these thoughts were cutting deeply into Dagmar's self-respect, as if to destroy it forever with one true and deadly thrust. "It won't be, it can't be," thought Dagmar passionately. "In some way I'll do something that will make everything right." But even as she thought that she would indomit-

ably lift herself, she had the futile sensation of a man who stands on the ground, inhaling deeply and willing firmly to soar away into the air. "I will, I will," she thought. "I'll do something. I'll never stop for the rest of my life. I'm not going to be just a failure."

With the sickness that had come from nervous exhaustion (she had not slept at all the night before, or all that day) she began going about the apartment, straightening furniture, putting away newspapers, and hanging up Herbie's hat and overcoat. She even got out a mending bag and began to sew up a rent that had kept her for two weeks from wearing a dress. And finally, at six o'clock, she left the sleeping Herbie and the despondent Marthena and went to dinner with Pal. To his anxious questionings she told him only that the most horrible thing she had ever dreamed of had happened and that some time she would tell him about it. Now, she wanted to be with him and forget, only to rest in his presence.

Having dinner with him was almost unbearably sweet, and the tears of tired nerves stood in her eyes more than once as they smiled silently at each other. Afterward they strolled up Clark Street, garish as an Eastern bazaar and with the lurking menace, reminiscent of stealthy Oriental murders. The elec-

tric lights lent a bizarre, incongruous brilliancy. The sky above, still blue, though darkling shadows enveloped the side streets, held a poignant and impenetrable sadness for Dagmar, and her feet dragged along on the pavements beside Palomon like the homeless feet of a ragamuffin. After all, what were she and Herbie but two helpless beings with nothing in the world, no place to go. The fact that they had to go and sit in the park when she and Pal wanted to rest, emphasized this feeling with a sudden sharp stripping of romance from all her gay adventure into the world. They were two weaklings, two dependents, and Pal with his strong young philosophy was alien, as incompetent as they, if he only knew it.

With a sudden shutting out of all thought she leaned against him on the park bench. Her overtired nerves gave way, for she had not slept at all. She sobbed comfortably and luxuriated in the feeling of his warm cheek against her wet one. "Tell me about it, darling," he murmured, "or don't tell me, just as you like."

"Not to-night, Pal, I couldn't. If you knew what it meant to me to have you for this little time, you—" she was too tired to go on. As they sat silently and so close together, Dagmar fell asleep and Pal did not awaken her until it was time to go in. They parted reluctantly at last, when she had

promised the worried young lover that she would go right to bed.

Marthena had gone out, and she thankfully made her bed ready for occupancy. But she had not undressed before Herbie came slowly in. "I guess I've been fired again," he announced lackadaisically.

A great congestion of despondency seemed to take possession of Dagmar's spirit. "What are you going to do, Herbie? What will become of you?"

"If it hadn't been for that damn father of ours I'd be all right. What'd he want to go and lose every cent grandfather left us for?"

"Oh, Herbie, that happened so long ago, don't you realize that you've got to do something. That things can't go on this way?"

"Yes, that's so," assented Herbie, without enthusiasm. "Now I got this darn woman on my hands," his tone was touched with a pale satisfaction in passing. "I ought to be able to get some of these boys around here to marry her, don't you think? How about this Alec that hangs around here so much. He'd be all right for her. Fact is, Dagmar, you're too hard on her. For somebody in her class she'd be all right. She's a darn nice girl in some ways——"

A moment of heaven-sent lucidity allowed Dagmar to doubt for a moment that she and Herbie were, after all, such Olympian beings as she had always supposed. But it faded. Herbie was in a

class far above Marthena, she told herself passionately. Her own brother!

But before she could form a suitable sentence to frame her thoughts they heard some one approaching, and Marthena, looking flushed and curiously triumphant, ushered Alec Jones into the room, distraught and with his eyes searching for Dagmar's with a great gust of sympathy and love behind them. Dagmar saw at once that Alec knew.

"We're going to get married," announced Marthena, smiling, and swaying her body in bashful delight at the sensation she knew she was causing. "Me and Alec." She looked scornfully at Herbie and triumphantly at Dagmar. Alec's eyes, exalted under the ordeal, sublimated his face with a radiance that waited for Dagmar's gratitude.

"Gee, that's slick," said Herbie, taking a hand slowly out of his pocket and advancing to congratulate his successful rival. Glowing with the fire of sacrifice for an ideal, Alec shook Herbie's hand fervently, for he no more realized what he was doing, or what he proposed to do, than does one who walks in a dream. He only knew that he was giving all he had to Dagmar, and, if he had thought of it, would have as gladly confessed fatherhood of the child. "I'm sure you'll be happy. She's really a swell kid, as I told you this evening."

"Herbie," said Dagmar sharply, "did you, you

don't mean to say that you actually suggested to Alec what you did to me?"

"Oh, but I'm glad to do it, Dagmar," said Alec quickly. "I only want you to know how happy I'm going to be, and how much I'll love doing it—" his eager young face pleaded for a sign that she recognized him as her secret vassal.

Dagmar passed her hands across her eyes. So many things had happened, that everything seemed to her to merge and blend into one vast cavern of chaos in which she and Herbie struggled interminably. "That's nonsense," she said vaguely, but as one who repeats a lesson. She had a feeling that the intrinsic wrongness of everything could be shown up as an underlying rightness, if she could denounce it now, however indeterminately; that when the smoke of the conflict was cleared away things would be once more in an orderly plan, if she could just hold to something, she did not know what, until it was over.

"Oh, yes, you're just mad because I've got one of your beaux," said Marthena, who had resumed her natural acting after a long fallow period. She laughed her next sentence. "Perhaps I'm not so unattractive after all."

"Perhaps not," echoed Dagmar, still in a state of haze. "Look here, Alec, I am not going to let you

ruin your life, whatever happens, just to get us out of a scrape. It looks to me as if everybody's life is spoiled that I know of, but there's no reason why you, a mere outsider, should horn"—her voice broke on the attempt at raillery—" in on our troubles."

"But, Dagmar," said Alec, melted to agony at the quaver in her voice. "I'm not a mere outsider. I can stand anything but that. Please don't think of me that way. Why, if you'd just think of me, as—well, as some one who helped you out once when you needed it, I'd be perfectly happy all my life. And I know you're going to be awfully happy with Pal, and honestly, Dagmar, I'm awfully glad you are going to, because I think he's a fine chap, and I—really, Dagmar, I'd be awfully—I'd just love to do it for you."

" I'm going out," said Dagmar hysterically. "All these people! Oh, we're crowded together just like animals. I've got to get out."

She ran out of the room, and Alec followed her, holding her coat up futilely, and begging her to take it as he ran. That night they tramped the streets, Alec silently beside Dagmar, while she tried to sift out the emotions and impressions of the last twenty-four hours and arrive at a sane solution of the terrible problem of Herbie.

Marthena would have to be married. That much

she had decided, or rather accepted as the decision of all of them. "He'll have to marry her," she said surprisingly to Alec after a long silent mile.

"But he can't support her," said Alec deprecatingly. "I mean, he's a fine chap and all that, but——"

"Lazy," said Dagmar. "I know." And they tramped on. By and by as their feet marched with an interminable rhythm over the hard resounding pavements something began to sing in the movements: tea-time-toi-lers-tea-time-toi-lers!

"My grandfather," she said in another of her incoherent bursts, "I'm thinking of him. He used to say that we were a family of tea-time toilers, and that we liked the cream, the froth of everything. He thought we were the last word, but when we haven't anything under us we break down."

"Oh, Dagmar, you don't. You're wonderful!"

Perhaps so small a thing as this bit of Alec's faith turned the fortune of all of them, for Dagmar suddenly had the conviction, which had been growing in her since the arrival of Herbie, blossom into full being, that the whole burden of the family's exquisite laziness would fall on her, as it had once fallen on Margaret. And the age-old glory of sacrifice descended over her; caught, possibly, from Alec Jones.

She turned on her heel and walked back to the apartment, where she announced with a tragedy that none of them noticed that Herbie must marry Marthena, after all. Herbie accepted his fate with a sort of relief which childishly asked no questions. Marthena gratefully overwhelmed Dagmar with a shower of sisterly love, and at the wedding, next day, Alec Jones acted as best man, while Martin Plunkitt soberly gave his sister away.

CHAPTER SIX

THUS THINGS PROCEED IN THEIR CIRCLE: THUS THE EMPIRE IS MAINTAINED

The twilight hovered, an elusive shadow and the sky, like a mammoth opal being imperceptibly shriven of its fire, had cooled in the east to a still, hushed blue. The lights along the avenue had a jaunty defiant air of adorning nature, and the motors running briskly along were incredibly unaware of the hush brooding on all the world.

It was the end of a wonderful week that Dagmar had spent with Pal, a time which was always completely beautiful to her because of the spiritual glamour of sacrifice that interwove it and sang through every incident. And on this, her last night before she was to take the train that was to carry her back to St. Paul, she was to tell him of her decision.

"The first night of summer," thought Dagmar poetically, "and before another summer I shall be married, and forever lost to happiness." She was vaguely happy as she thought of herself in the future, empty and splendid like a carved, wineless goblet, for the nearness of Pal gave this future only

a sentimental reality. She could have wept emotional, satisfying tears. "Marriage and then a continual round of searching, searching, searching, to get back to this moment," thought Dagmar. "To taste just for one instant what I am drinking tonight. Youth. Love. Everything, but most of all Pal."

The unsuspecting Pal beamed down at her. "Wonderful night."

She smiled gently. She thought of the valley from her old room at home over which she had looked down through her childhood. The valley as changing and as changeless as the sea, where she had so often sat while the wayward butterfly of her thoughts flitted from image to image of incidents in which Pal was the dominant figure. There was always the same reach to the distant bluffs across the invisible river, just as there was always Pal to think about, and the trailing mists had always only modified the pictures. "It was all a looking forward to the moment I am living now," she thought romantically.

They walked until a theatrical moon of animated gold appeared in the sky. It seemed covered with a thick down, almost fleecy. The white clouds behind it were a foamy sea through which its faint path suffered a slow dilution. "It's like the South Sea Islands," breathed Dagmar.

"In the 'Follies,'" added Pal.

Some clock of many-colored tones struck a quavering note and died on the air; a pause and then another strike rang out, and Dagmar knew that eight more strikes would come and it would be ten o'clock and time to begin the preliminaries of her parting with Pal.

"I've something to say," she said rather timidly.

"Then say it with food," invited Pal. "I'm starving." He led her into a restaurant, though she protested, for in her mood, she felt that the glaring lights of a public place were no fitting setting for what she had to say. When Pal had youthfully ordered beefsteak, she told him in sketchy outlines that she had made up her mind to marry Will. "But give me a little time, Dagmar," said Pal desperately when he understood that she was serious, which at first he could not believe. "Some day I'll have money. And then I'll take on the responsibility of Herbie. Dagmar, it won't be long——"

"It's not Herbie," said Dagmar. "It's not a sacrifice for Herbie alone. It's just that I realize you can't have too many luxuries in a family. If you're lazy you can't have other things. You can't triumph over poverty, for instance—be like you are, I mean, so wonderful and proud." Her voice broke and then gained a sudden strength as she finished.

"That's what I love about you, that efficiency in spite of blotches."

"You don't trust me," said the boy. "You won't let me be efficient for you."

"You can't be—for me. It's just that all of us are what grandfather called tea-time toilers. We want to dance on the top of things, but when there's nothing under us we fall."

"You'd have me under you," said Pal wildly. "Dagmar, you're wrong, you're wrong, and I'll never forgive you. I'll never forgive you."

She began again and told him the whole story of Marthena and Herbie. Perhaps the self-satisfaction which is the special gift of the righteous was a little too evident in her narrative as she ended: "The strong prey on the weak in the beginning, thus making them weaker than ever, and thus the strong have the weak on their hands. Therefore they must take care of them, which they do to their own discomfort, and therefore it will be up to me to marry a man who not only can but will take care of me and the whole family, including my charming sister-in-law."

"Dagmar, I can't bear you and your infant philosophizings," said Pal wryly. He rested his head on his hand and looked at her with pain-wracked blue eyes that were to haunt her for a long time.

"I can't bear myself, either, Pal. But please un-

derstand I'm incapable of sustained action. I know that, and you don't believe it. I couldn't bear it, if you did believe it. But I can splurge and do big, grand things. I'm capable of sacrificing you and me and, oh!" she closed her eyes, "the beautiful, beautiful, you know, the usness of everything! But I can't just work from day to day and——"

"Let's kill ourselves," said Pal, but even as he said it, in the face of Dagmar's bleak phrases, it sounded, not heroic, not depressing, just childish

"If we only could," sighed Dagmar, "if we only could." She put her elbows with their tight silk sleeves on the table and rested her chin on her hands to look up at him, more beautiful than she had ever been in her life. "Isn't it funny. Here we sit, eating beefsteak and parting, parting—" Under his eyes, a small gasp stopped her and tears came to her eyes. "Let's not think about it any more. There's half an hour more. Let's be gay. Let's pretend that this is the first night we've met, and we have everything ahead of us, days and days of Palishness——"

"And Dagmarishness," smiled Pal responsively. "It's funny how alike we are," Dagmar was thinking; "that we can both laugh and yet understand that it's tragic underneath."

Later, in her stuffy upper berth, Dagmar lay, pil-

lowless, flat on her stomach like an animal burrowing into the ground. "Pal, Pal, Pal," said her heart over and over, and the wheels under her turned round and round. "Farther and farther from Pal," they sang, "farther and farther and farther." Cruel wheels, if they would only stop their senseless repetition. But they couldn't and each revolution was taking her farther and farther and farther. "Oh, God, I wish I knew! I wish I knew! Is this really right or am I just being a weakling like the rest of the family, . . . taking the easiest way? I've never wanted money. I've never wanted money. Only love. . . . Only love. . . ." Farther and farther and farther . . . farther and farther and farther. . . .

Bill Gles